

# India's Villages



EDITED BY

**M. N. SRINIVAS**

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## A Note to the Second Edition

The appearance of a second edition of *India's Villages* shows that it has met a "felt need". The alterations made in this edition are of a minor kind—the typographical errors have been corrected, the note on the contributors has been brought up to date, and some minor changes have been made in the editor's introduction and in Dr. Jyotirmoyee Sarma's essay. That is all.

The editor would like to stress once again a point made in the introduction: all the essays in the book are tentative in character, many of them being written while the field-work was actually in progress. Some of the contributors have subsequently published papers pertaining to their field-data in journals and books. And others are busy writing up their material for publication. It is obvious that in all such cases the later publica-

tion should be regarded as modifying and correcting the statements made in this book.

Subsequent to the publication of this book, a few essays have appeared in the *Economic Weekly* on villages in the Ratanmahals, Panchmahals, Malwa and Mysore. It is hoped that in the near future a few more essays, similar in quality, will be forthcoming and they will form another volume. The need for accurate information about rural social life in different parts of India is as acute as before, and it is a matter for gratification that there is in India today much greater appreciation of the work of sociologists and anthropologists than before.

*Delhi School of Economics*  
8 July 1960

M. N. SRINIVAS



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## INDIA'S VILLAGES



THE essays collected together in this volume appeared originally in *The Economic Weekly* between October 1951 and May 1954. The enthusiastic welcome accorded to them by anthropologists, sociologists, welfare workers, planners and others has been responsible for their appearance in book-form. The first edition of this book was brought out by the Government of West Bengal to which the thanks of the editor of this series and of the editor of the *Economic Weekly* are due.

It is necessary to stress that these essays were written for laymen. The contributors have tried to make their articles readable, and to this end technical terms have been avoided as far as possible. It is also necessary to add that the essays are tentative in the extreme. Some of them were written after three or four months in field, and while the field-work was still in progress. Field-work is a whole-time and consuming activity, and one is often under the spell of some fact or theory which has gripped one. Further, it is common experience that the facts which are collected in the latter half of one's stay are much fuller and more accurate than those collected in the first half. They frequently modify, and even occasionally contradict, the facts collected in the first few weeks of one's stay in the field. This has induced two of our contributors, Dr. Bailey<sup>1</sup> and Mr. Newell, to rewrite their essays completely. The other contributors have allowed their essays to stand more or less as they originally appeared in *The Economic Weekly*. Prof. D. G. Mandelbaum has chosen to contribute a second essay on an all-India theme which has direct relevance to the work of planners and welfare workers.

While each contributor was invited to write on the social life of the village he had intensively studied he was given the freedom to write on an aspect of it which he either found most interesting or considered important. Villages differ from each

<sup>1</sup> Both the essays of Dr. Bailey are included in this volume.

other, especially so, villages in widely-separated parts of the country. For instance, the "hermit" village of Malana is quite different from Dilwara in Rajasthan, or Kumbapettai in Tanjore, or Hattarahalli in Mysore. The physical, social and linguistic isolation of Malana has enabled it to be more or less completely autonomous, and Dr. Rosser understandably concentrates on the manner in which the local forces of law and order, independent of the authority of any government, provincial or central, operate there, while the striking thing about Dilwara is the sudden effects of the abolition of Zamin-dari, and about Hattarahalli, the effects of nearness to a big and highly industrialised city. The difference between villages cannot all be reduced to the degree of proximity to the forces of urbanization, industrialisation and Westernisation. Each village has a pattern and mode of life which is to some extent unique. Villages next door to each other differ considerably, and this fact is recognised by rural folk. Besides, every contributor has his own special interest, and each essay is the outcome of the contact of a particular mind with a particular field-situation. But this should not be taken to mean that there are no regional or even all-India uniformities.

The villages described in these essays cover a wide range. Geographically speaking they cover the country between Himachal Pradesh in the north and Tanjore in the south, Rajasthan in the west and West Bengal in the east. There are, however, conspicuous gaps, e.g., Andhra, Maharashtra, Gujarat and Bihar.<sup>2</sup>

These essays include villages which are inhabited by Hindus or tribal folk exclusively as well as mixed villages in which Hindus and tribal folk live together. A few villages include members of more than one religion, either Hindus and

<sup>2</sup> The gaps are being narrowed. See Dr. Y. V. S. Nath's essay, "The Bhils of Ratanmahals: Lineage and Local Community" in the *Economic Weekly*, Vol. VI, No. 49, 4 December 1954, Mr. A. M. Shah's "Caste, Economy and Territory in the Central Panchmahals", in the journal of the M. S. University of Baroda, Vol. IV, No. 1, March 1955, and Dr. A. C. Mayer's "Change in a Malwa Village", in the *Economic Weekly*, Vol. VII, No. 39, 24 September 1955.

Muslims, or Hindus and Christians. A few are bi- or tri-lingual. Dr. Dube's village in the Deccan is one of the most complex, including as it does Marathi- and Telugu-speaking Hindus, Muslims, and three separate tribal groups. The range of castes covered in each Hindu group too is great.

The number of castes living in a village is an important thing. Each caste has a culture of its own which is to some extent different from the culture of the others. The structure becomes more complex as the number of castes increases. The structure of the Gaddi village of Goshen, or Malana, or the Bhil villages of Rajasthan, is certainly simpler, for instance, than the villages described by Drs. Sarma, Gough and Dube. Size too is an important matter in this connection: the smallest village in this series has about 500 inhabitants while the largest about 2,750. The largest has certainly more castes and tribal groups than the smallest. Some of the villages, for instance, Goshen, Malana and the Bhil villages of Rajasthan, enjoy a degree of isolation which is denied to the others. Dr. Sarma's and Dr. Beals's villages are both near big cities and might, in the not distant future, become suburbs, though at present they still retain many rural features. Proximity to a city should not be measured in terms of distance but communicability. A village which is fifty miles from a city but on a bus route is more exposed to urban influences than another which is only fifteen miles away, but is at some distance from the bus route. This point is obvious, but not always kept in mind.

Dr. Miller's villages on the Kerala coast in south India are dispersed while most of the others described in this series are nucleated. But dispersed villages are not, however, confined to the west coast of India—they seem to occur elsewhere too, for instance, in the Bhil country to the east and north of Gujarat, and in Coorg and western Mysore. What other differences accompany nucleation or dispersal? This question can only be answered after a systematic comparison of nucleated and dispersed villages in different parts of the country. An important difference seems to be that whereas in the case of a nucleated village, the problem of defending the village from dacoits and wild animals is thrown on all the huts and houses



collected together in the settlement, in the case of the dispersed village, each farm has to protect itself against its enemies. The kin-group owning the farm and its servants must have enough man-power to be able to defend itself when necessary. The houses or huts built on the farm must be built with an eye to defence—an extreme instance of this is provided by a Coorg or Nayar house. It would be interesting to find out if dispersed villages are associated with large unilinear groups and martial institution among the farmers.

## II

It is a welcome fact that anthropologists from India, the United Kingdom and U.S.A. have contributed to this series. If there is any regret at all it is that anthropologists from other parts of the world have not contributed to it. The personality of the anthropologist is an extremely important factor in the study of a society. His cultural and social background, his intellectual training, and his temperament and interests all go to determine both what he selects for observation and how he interprets it. Two anthropologists writing about the same tribe or village will write accounts which in many ways will be different from each other. What the anthropologist selects for observation is to some extent dependent upon the society in which he is born and has grown up. For instance, an anthropologist from U.S.A. might find the strict segregation of the sexes prevalent in our society strange, while an anthropologist from another country may not. He might find something else strange. While an anthropologist is trained to record practically everything about the society he is studying, in practice what hits his eye is something which he is not used to in his own society.

There is another fact which is worthy of note. It is much more difficult for an Indian to observe his own society than it is for a non-Indian. It is true that a number of languages are spoken in India, and that within the same linguistic region there are important differences between castes, and that there are a variety of tribes which differ from one another. Yet in spite of all this there is a certain unity, and above all, a sense

of familiarity, which deadens instead of stimulating curiosity. At a deeper level, one is so fundamentally and even hopelessly enslaved in one's own society, that detachment is well-nigh impossible. Such detachment is necessary if one wants to present an account of one's society which is intelligible to others. Discussions with non-Indian anthropologists or laymen about India strikingly reveal that there is a tendency to take things for granted in one's own society. This is specially true of simple or common actions. In fact, I would go so far as to maintain that the study of an alien society is a prerequisite to understanding one's own.

There is an acute shortage of sociologists and social anthropologists in our country today. It is only now that our Universities are beginning to realize the importance of sociology and anthropology. But even today not every university has a chair in sociology or social anthropology. The Government of India also shows awareness of the relevance of sociological and social anthropological studies in carrying out its programme of socio-economic development, and this is to be welcomed. But there is a danger here which must be pointed out if sociology and social anthropology are not to take a wrong direction. The Government of India has an understandable tendency to stress the need for sociological research that is directly related to planning and development. And it is the duty of sociologists as citizens that they should take part in such research. But there is a grave risk that "pure" or "fundamental" research might be sacrificed altogether. We are not so rich in our human resources that we can afford to have our few sociologists all doing applied research. The pressure in favour of applied research is real, and besides, funds are not available for "pure" research. Soon "pure" sociology might disappear from this country. India, within whose hospitable frontiers live innumerable communities, each with its own cultural and social peculiarities, is obviously one of the most important countries for conducting sociological research. The vast and rapid changes which are taking place at present lend a note of urgency to our studies. As sociologists we owe a duty to our discipline to give some at least of our time and energy to studies which are scientifically most rewarding.



## III

The unity of the village is a point made by many of the contributors to this series. A body of people living in a restricted area, at some distance from other similar groups, with extremely poor roads between them, the majority of the people being engaged in agricultural activity, all closely dependent upon each other economically and otherwise, and having a vast body of common experience, must have some sense of unity. The point is so simple and obvious that it seems hardly worth making it but for the existence of the institution of caste. Caste is even today an institution of great strength, and as marriage and dining are forbidden with members of other castes, the members of a caste living in a village have many important ties with their fellow caste-men living in neighbouring villages. These ties are so powerful that a few anthropologists have been led into asserting that the unity of the village is a myth and that the only thing which counts is caste. Secondly, in spite of the fact that communications between villages are still poor and were even poorer in the past, they were far from being self-contained. Intimate links, economic, religious and social, existed between neighbouring villages. It is argued that the many strong ties which existed between villages came in the way of the development of a sense of village unity. If in the nucleated villages, a sense of unity is weakened if not destroyed by caste and by the interdependence of villages, it ought to be even weaker in dispersed villages. The unity of the village is not then an axiom to be taken for granted, but something that has to be shown to exist.

The view that the solidarity of caste is so great that it nullifies the unity of the village community in those villages in which more than one caste live, is so plausible that it has misled not a few. But a moment's reflection will expose its falsity. It is true that caste is an institution of prodigious strength, and that it is pervasive. It undertakes numerous activities, and occasionally, the members of a sub-caste living in neighbouring villages meet together to consider a matter of common concern to the caste. But all this does not make a caste self-sufficient. The castes living in a village or other local area are

interdependent economically and otherwise. Ideally, each caste enjoys a monopoly of an occupation, and this monopoly both unites as well as divides the people enjoying the monopoly. While the members resent other castes taking over this occupation (this is not true of agriculture though) and secrets of the occupation are closely guarded among the members, rivalry between the members for the custom of the other castes does, in fact, exist, and it divides them. The fact that the members of a caste in a village are, at any rate in south India, linked by ties of kinship does not lessen the rivalry. It is true that a man does not easily change his barber or carpenter or washerman or potter as payment is made annually in grain, and old relationships are respected. But this does not mean that continued inefficiency or non-payment will be tolerated for a long time. The monopoly in the custom of a family is not so rigid as to be absolute.

The strong rivalries which exist between the members of a non-agricultural or servicing caste often force them to seek friends outside their own caste. Again, the lower castes, in spite of the troubles and humiliation of subordination, are aware that the system guarantees them a living. Members of different castes are also linked in other ways: the relationships of landlord and tenant, master and servant, creditor and debtor, and patron and client ignore caste barriers to bind together people who are unequal. These relationships may also cross the village boundary, but a good many of them will be found inside it.

The concept of the "dominant caste" is relevant in this connection. A caste is dominant when it is numerically the strongest in the village or local area, and economically and politically exercises a preponderating influence. It need not be the highest caste in terms of traditional and conventional ranking of castes. The situation described by Dr. Gough for Kumbapettai is no longer typical. Any caste may be the dominant caste in an area though I have not come across the Untouchables being dominant anywhere. Occasionally, a group originally outside the Hindu fold, such as the Coorgs or the Raj Gonds, may become dominant by virtue of their numbers, wealth and martial prowess. The point that is important here is



that the dominant caste supports and maintains the total system. The dominant caste respects the code of every caste even when some features of it are different from the code of the dominant caste. Disputes occurring among the non-dominant castes are occasionally taken to the elders of the dominant caste. The autonomy of a caste court is only part of the story—there is a tendency to refer disputes upwards locally to the elders of the dominant caste as quite a few contributors have noticed. The elders of a caste living in a group of neighbouring villages are called in only rarely to settle serious disputes which concern the caste exclusively. What is much more common is the type of caste cited by Dr. Gough. The Peasant (Okkaliga) elders of Rampura were frequently being called to settle disputes among the other castes including Muslims.

The ties cutting across the lines of caste are as important as the ties of caste. The stressing of horizontal ties at the expense of vertical ones has been the cause of much confusion. Village unity cannot however be reduced to the interplay of these various ties. It is normally not visible, but some incident suddenly and strikingly reveals its existence. When the village is threatened with an epidemic or drought or floods or fire, or when the government passes an order which the villagers regard as unjust, or on certain religious occasions, or in a fight with a neighbouring village, the unity of the village reveals itself in an unmistakable manner.

In his article, "Village Structure in North Kerala", Dr. Miller states that Nambudri Brahmins "were partly superior to terrestrial divisions". This is an important point. The Brahmin, by virtue of his ritual position, seems both to belong to the village and not belong to it. For instance, in a fight between two villages a Brahmin priest of one of the villages would probably not be beaten unless he had personally participated in the fight, whereas in the case of a member of, say, one of the middle castes, personal participation would probably not be necessary for him to be beaten. This does not mean that the Brahmin is free to do what he wants. Dr. Bailey gives an instance of a Brahmin being disciplined by the others, and I was told about a similar incident in Kere, a village near Rampura.

The position, then, is complicated. The Brahmin is given some respect by virtue of his ritual position, but he is not allowed to take advantage of this to do what he pleases. There is a line which he may not cross. In an exactly opposite sense Untouchables are both part of and not part of the village. The Muslims too have such a position, and this is because they are outside the Hindu fold. Some of those living in the village may be said to be full members while others are only partly so. People may not enjoy full membership because they are partly above the village (e.g., Brahmins), or because they are partly below it (e.g., Untouchables) or partly outside it (e.g., Muslims). This way of describing the situation is not very satisfactory, but it will have to do till a less unsatisfactory way is available. The way membership of a caste affects the extent to which one is called upon to participate in the activities of the village is a matter which has to be investigated. Comparison with hierarchical systems in other parts of the world will probably shed some light.

In many spheres the strength of caste has increased in the last few decades, and bitterness between castes is a prominent feature of our urban life. But in the villages the complementariness of castes is still visible. One of the effects of British rule has been the increase in caste solidarity. What Dr. Miller says about pre-British north Kerala is also true of a good part of the entire country: "The main structural cleavages were between territorial units—villagers, chiefdoms, kingdoms—not between castes. Inter-caste relations were, on the contrary, of a complementary nature, involving traditionally ordained and clear-cut rights and obligations, authority, and subordination". The imposition of *Pax Britannica* over the whole country weakened vertical ties, and strengthened horizontal ones. The building of roads and railways and the coming of printed books and newspapers widened the range of castes and increased their solidarity—witness, for instance, the efflorescence of caste journals and newspapers. Dr. Bailey has suggested that as the village gets more closely integrated with the larger economy of the country, it becomes less of a unity. Such integration is increasing everyday, and widespread industrialisation and growing paternalism on the part of the State will increasingly



reduce this sense of unity. Dr. Gough prophesies that "the gradual drift to the cities of an educated aristocracy, the transfer of land to middle-class trading families of the towns, and the infiltration of a small, autonomous working class group supported by urban forms of labour have begun this process, and it may be expected to continue until the village has lost its traditional integration and become little more than a unit of neighbourhood".

Does a sense of unity exist in dispersed villages? A nucleated village can be easily identified: the houses and huts are huddled in the middle and the fields lie all round. It is easy to distinguish one village from another. But this is not so in north Kerala, Coorg and the western parts of Mysore. Dr. Miller tells us "a physical, territorial unity may exist, but it is not often obvious, because of scattered settlement. . . . Economic unity may be modified by the extension of caste obligations to several villages or their restriction to a segment of a single village". Thus, ". . . a family of the Kanisan (astrologer) caste might have less than enough work in its own village, A, and be the official astrologer family serving the adjoining village B as well. Basket-making families in B might serve villages in A and C in addition to their own. The family of a small sub-caste that cuts hair and assists at funerals of the blacksmith and carpenter castes may well have a clientele in a dozen other villages".

Thus the local settlement in Kerala is the meeting place of several non-agricultural castes each of which serves a different set of villages. This feature is not unknown in nucleated villages, but it is not so striking there. Dr. Miller rightly concludes that ". . . although any sociological investigator in Kerala may provisionally take the modern *deśam* as a suitable unit for study, he must examine the scale of social relations over a broader area. Whatever internal self-subsistence there may have been in the *deśams* of the eighteenth century and earlier, it is very difficult nowadays in Kerala to point to any unit as a clearly demarcated, coherent, independent village community".

The village may be a nebulous concept in Kerala, but this does not mean that there is no local community there. Only it does not coincide with any administrative unit. The castes in

an area are interdependent and bound by strong ties to each other. This situation is not however peculiar to the dispersed area. Even a nucleated village has a number of intimate links with its neighbours. What Dr. Marian Smith says of the Punjab village is probably applicable to many other villages as well. "In terms of economic and social specialisation, marital ties, and religious and political organisation, the structural unit is larger than the village. These are not contacts in which the villager may indulge, they are imposed upon him by the habits of his existence. Important as these village studies may be, therefore . . . it does not seem to me that any complete picture of Punjab life can ever be obtained from them alone".

The villager's social field is thus much wider than his village. Kin, economic, religious and other social ties enlarge the field to include a circle of neighbouring villages. But ever since the beginning of British rule, political and economic decisions taken in London and Manchester have affected the Indian peasant in his remotest village. And in Independent India, not a day passes without some fresh evidence of the government's solicitude for the rural folk. The social anthropologist who studies a single village should not only bear in mind the fact that it has important ties with other villages, but also that political and economic forces set in motion in the larger society affect it fundamentally.

What has been said above has direct bearing on the question of the self-sufficiency of the villages, a point which has been adequately dealt with by Dr. Marian Smith. "As long as we mean by self-sufficiency in India an earlier condition under which few manufactured items were introduced into the village from outside, we are treading on fairly safe ground. But so soon as we imply by the term that the shift toward industrialisation involves a shift towards specialisation and toward interdependency, we are falling very wide off the mark. The effect of industrialisation upon the Indian village is to shift from one sort of interdependency to another, from one sort of specialisation to another". The completely self-sufficient village republic is a myth; it was always part of a wider entity. Only, villages in pre-British India were less dependent economically on the towns than villages are today.



There is in this connection an important difference between north and south Indian villages, and this is remarked upon by both Dr. Marriott and Dr. Smith. In extra-peninsular India, i.e., India between the Himalayas and Vindhya, a man marries outside his village. In fact an exogamous circle with a radius of four miles may be drawn round a man's village. In U.P. the average distance of marriage is twelve miles while in the Punjab "two-thirds of the marriages have taken place with villages between four and twelve miles from Jhabal, with the greatest number clustering around the eight-mile radius" Village exogamy is combined with hypergamy, i.e., village A only receives brides from B, but does not return the compliment. One of the effects of village exogamy and hypergamy is to spatially widen the range of ties. *The ties are not repetitive, but extensive.* An exactly opposite principle obtains in peninsular India. The preference for marriage with certain near relatives such as a cross cousin and cross niece (a man's elder sister's daughter) has a limiting effect on the social space of the peasant. Such relatives often live in the same or nearby village. The village is not an exogamous unit. Preference for marriage with certain relatives tends to multiply the bonds one has with the same body or bodies of people. Intensification is the operative principle in south India while extension is the principle in the North. The significance of this difference in other features of social life has yet to be studied. Cross cousin marriage in India has so far been studied only at the kinship level, and its "political" effects have been ignored.

A number of contributors have touched upon the changes taking place in their village: and this is hardly to be wondered at. Legislation abolishing *zamindari* and *inam* lands, conditions of tenancy, increasing the power of *panchayats* and introducing a new mode of recruiting members to them and the inauguration of Community Projects and agricultural extension services in many parts of India, are beginning radically to alter the face of rural India. In addition, new roads are being made, old roads are being improved, communication by bus is increasing, and rice, flour and oil mills are numerous. Urbanisation and industrialisation are proceeding apace. This cannot but have effects on the way of life of the people. In Dr. Beals's Hattarahalli

rules regarding inter-dining seem to be less rigid than in Rampura in the same linguistic area, and besides, several men are employed as teachers and factory workers. The occupational pattern has begun to change. The urbanized and westernized younger men have different values from the elders. The introduction of democracy gives them a chance to assert themselves against their elders. Struggle for power between the two groups is becoming more common.

The two five-year plans aim, among other things, to increase agricultural production and to change the social life of our peasantry. An intimate knowledge of the social life of our peasantry in different parts of the country, obtained by men trained to obtain such knowledge, would have been thought helpful in the execution of the plans, in avoiding avoidable human misery, and in increasing efficiency. I may add here that I am not one of those social scientists who believe that the social scientist holds the key to the success of the plans. The far-reaching claims made on behalf of the social scientist are unjustified and will, in the long run, do nothing but harm to the social sciences.

The anthropologist for instance, has intimate and first-hand knowledge of one or two societies, and has read several accounts about people in areas other than his own. He can place his understanding of a village or tribe at the disposal of the planner. He can understand and sympathise with the difficulties of his peasant or tribesman. He may in some cases even be able to anticipate the kind of reception a particular administrative measure may have. But he cannot lay down policy because it is the result of certain decisions about right and wrong. Politicians and reformers lay down policy, and the anthropologist can at best make clear the implications of a particular policy. From the point of view of the growth of social anthropology, concentration on the merely useful or practical is not altogether healthy. The theoretical growth of the subject will be neglected as the best talent will be drawn into applied work. The only safeguard against this is the establishment of university teaching and research departments in social anthropology or the creation of an institute for fundamental research.

It is necessary to mention here that the views expressed in this introduction are entirely my own and no other contributor shares any responsibility for them. And this applies to the views of the other contributors as well. The only views which all the contributors share are that intensive field-work by trained men is the only, the best, and the cheapest method of acquiring intimate knowledge of our villages, and that carrying out such studies is an urgent and important task.



*David G. Mandelbaum*

## **Social Organization and Planned Culture Change in India**

THE large-scale development plans which are now under way in India are, in the main, plans for technological and economic change. As these plans become realized, they cannot but have effect on social organization and be affected by it. Such reciprocal influence is now being felt in various spheres of Indian society. Certain broad trends of this interaction can be stated, as they are seen in the joint family, in caste structure, in village organization and in relation between villagers and government. The formulation of these trends is necessarily tentative, based as it is on relatively few and widely scattered observations. But the observations are quite consistent despite the variety of villages seen and the variegated background of the observers. Hence the statements can be made as a preliminary formulation, to be modified, amended, and enlarged as additional evidence becomes available.

The joint family has long been the common form of family organization in India, sanctified in scripture and sanctioned in secular law. It consists typically of a set of men, related as fathers and sons, or brothers, together with their wives and children. The several nuclear families thus grouped together form a single unit of consumers and often also a single producing unit. The property of all is held in common under the trusteeship of the senior male; every male child is entitled to a share of the joint family property. All in the joint family are fed from a single kitchen and receive money from the family purse. Among cultivators, all in the joint family work together for the family's crop.

Joint families have long been in a continuous process of formation and fission. As a joint family came to include many nuclear families, and as the men were mainly the sons and grandsons of brothers rather than brothers, strains developed which caused such a joint family to divide the common property, and split up. The usual reason given for such partition is that



the women could not get along together. Thus parted, a man alone or a set of brothers established a new joint family. As their children grew to adulthood and their sons married and had children, that joint family might increase to a point where it was of a size conducive to partition and the process would be repeated.

Formation and fission go on now as they have before but the regular tendency is toward smaller joint families. Many factors are involved in this, among them the increased chances for a man to earn a living as an individual rather than as one of a joint family team, and the decreased willingness to be subservient to the head of the family or to pool both effort and income. An added impetus toward splitting the larger joint families has come about in those areas where land reform measures have been introduced. These measures to place ownership of land in the hands of those who cultivate it figure prominently as many programmes for increased agricultural output.

A common feature of these measures is to set a limit to the amount of land which any family may own. Hence in these circumstances the men of a large joint family hasten to split up into nuclear families when such reform measures are brought about lest they be restricted to a holding uneconomical for a large family group. With formal separation there tends to be separation in fact also, at least in so far as the joint family is a producing unit. But in many cases the larger family group is a much more efficient producing unit than is the small family group. This is especially true where continuous work is required, as where ripening crops must be watched against animal and human predators and when field labour must be quickly mobilized and intensively worked, as at harvest. The larger joint family is also more apt than the smaller to be able to raise the capital necessary for implements and animals. Thus one rather unforeseen, though by no means inevitable, consequence of land reform may be a hastening of the push toward smaller families with some consequent decline in agricultural efficiency. This may well be only a short-term effect, with the smaller family becoming the more efficient producing unit over a longer period, but the problem deserves close examination on the basis of good statistical information.

Caste structure has close ties with village economics. In the classical system of relations among castes in a village, the *jājmāni* system, the various non-cultivating castes provided specialised services for the cultivators and received foodstuffs in return. The economic interdependence is strictly regulated by social and religious patterns which both keep the caste groups segregated in certain respects and require communication and interchange in other respects. Caste ranking and economic status were, and for many villages still are, closely linked. The not un plentiful exceptions, say of Brahmin labourers and even beggars, or of Maharajas of lowly caste origin, should not obscure the fact that the families of higher caste in a village usually have also a higher standard of food and housing. Caste rank is particularly manifest through ritual symbols: a group which was economically well-off could acquire ritual hallmark to raise its relative position in the hierarchy. The caste system, as it has operated for some two millennium, was far from the tight social straight jacket it is sometimes made out to be.

The results of the development programmes of the last century in the fields of transportation and communication, in the spread of western education, in the frequent switch from subsistence crops to cash crops, have all had consequences on village caste relations. But the criteria of ritual rank are not greatly changed—the eating of meat and the performance of menial services are still stigmas of lower rank—and ritual rank remains a main concern in the village. While there may be some relaxation of the taboos on inter-dining among castes there is no easing of the prohibition of intermarriage.

As the newer development programmes take effect there often is some levelling of economic differences among the villagers. The less high castes, newly advantaged, jockey for higher ritual rank and may attempt to use their new political franchise to gain both economic and ritual prerogatives for their caste. In some areas, as in Malabar, caste members who formerly had no wider social horizon than their caste fellows of nearby villages are now organized with formal officers and stated purposes reminiscent of chambers of commerce.



One exception to the levelling effect of the newer development programmes must be noted. The lowest castes, those who are mainly landless labourers, often gain nothing at all from the irrigation projects and the redistribution of land. They have nothing to begin with, nothing which can be improved, no means of getting an economic start and so they remain economically as well as socially disadvantaged. The gap between them and the other villagers frequently widens rather than diminishes on account of development projects.

The changing nature of caste has effect on village social organization and on agricultural output. The social and economic systems were both relatively stable over many centuries partly because they reinforced each other. Now that both are being modified though still closely connected, changes in one may accelerate changes in the other. Thus the *jājmāni* system of traditional, personal, exchange relations is being replaced by contractual, impersonal, pecuniary relations. Many cultivators who could summon sudden aid if quickly needed from among their traditional associates of other castes now can hire labour only if they have the cash. This process is a familiar one and has been going on in India for a century or more. But in recent years the full effect of the change is being widely felt.

One effect on the lowest castes is to cut them adrift from the other villagers of greater rank and wealth on whom they could depend in case of dire need. Their village patrons might never do much more for them than keep them alive, but at least they would usually keep them from outright starvation and the lowest would have their part and their enjoyment in the celebration and festivities of the higher castes. Now the lowest castemen tend to have no such support, save when they are hired by the day, and they can only look to each other for group strength. This strength is beginning to be mobilized, not by the very poorest and most provincial, but by those among them who have seen something of the world outside the village and have drawn motivation as well as material advantage from that experience.

As the rights and obligations of one village caste to another tend to lapse, so does the whole village drift away from the

ceremonial order within which these reciprocal patterns were organized and reinforced. The traditional caste system provides for a division of labour, the traditional ceremonial order stipulates how and when the various divisions co-operate and are rewarded. With the loosening of the system of economic co-operation under religious auspices there is not usually available as effective a plan of village co-operation under purely economic or political auspices, and agricultural output may decline for this reason. This is not to say that those villages where the old ceremonial order is most punctiliously observed are necessarily the most efficient economically. There the transition difficulties may only be delayed rather than averted. It is to point out that social and ceremonial forces may not figure in the blueprints for development plans but they may obtrude forcibly when the plans mature.

Governmental agencies, of both the central and the state administrations, have attempted to encourage the growth of a new social organization in the village which would be able to cope with modern problems and could make the transition from the old order to some new procedure. Legislation has been passed in some provinces and funds provided to enable village councils, *panchāyats*, to be formed and to function. In name, these are the same as the traditional councils which have for centuries adjudicated disputes among villagers. In manner of composition, in function, they are very different. The members of the new *panchāyat* must be elected, must electioneer; in the old, they were accorded place by universal respect and could hardly keep that respect if they pressed their claims. The old councils were arbitrary, conserving agencies whose prime function was to smooth over or settle village friction. The new *panchāyats* are supposed to be innovating, organizing bodies working for changes rather than conserving solidarity.

Where they have been installed, the new *panchāyats* seem generally to be off to a shaky start. There is some tendency for them to become the battleground of village factionalism. Factionalism has long been a frequent disrupter of joint village action. The traditional ceremonial order provides opportunities for the healing of factional breaks by mandatory



co-operation towards common ceremonial goals. With the passing of the old ceremonial order, there is not the same rejoining of those whom factional disputes have rent asunder. And village elections may become little more than ways of crystallizing each opposing and non-co-operating faction. In some villages the new *panchāyat* is less a forum for factionalism than it is an empty form set up for the satisfaction of visiting officials. In such villages the older *panchāyat* continues to function much as it has before.

But as a social form, it is not felt adequate by many villagers to deal with the new economic and technological influences—the procuring of irrigation water or of fertilisers, for example—and these influences reach even to relatively remote villages. Hence there is widely in Indian villages today a process of social change from the traditional forms and orders to some other forms. The newer forms may not be those proposed by legislators and planners but they are also not, it seems probable, a mere recasting of the older social system. The influence of technological change has set this process of social change in motion and it seems as though the economic loss during social transition may, at this stage, threaten any economic gains from technological change.

As more anthropological reports of Indian villages appear, we may be able to state more precisely the major variations on the social consequences of planned technological change, the social alternatives available to villagers and the pressure, internal and external, which impel villagers toward one societal form or another.

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M. N. Srinivas

**The Social Structure  
of a Mysore Village\***

THERE are about 560 thousand villages in what is now the Indian Union and the bulk of the population of 357 millions live in these villages where the traditional mode of life still persists. But the villages have begun to change rapidly and the pace of the change is likely to increase rather than decrease in the near future. This makes the field study of typical villages in the different linguistic areas of our country an urgent necessity. Either we collect the facts now, or they are lost for ever.

The Indian village community has figured rather prominently in early sociological literature. Sir Henry Maine brought the Indian village community into prominence by making it the basis of his theory of primitive communism of property. Basing his theories on a certain type of village community existing in parts of north India, he argued that originally land, that is property, was owned jointly by kin-groups, and that individual ownership of land was a later phenomenon in the history of human societies. Attempts to reconstruct the history of social institutions were fashionable in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Social anthropology, or comparative sociology, is a more mature subject today, and consequently, social anthropologists are more modest than their Victorian predecessors. They either attempt to describe the structural features of a small society which they have studied intensively for two or three years, or compare similar institutions in a few neighbouring societies.

We may note briefly one or two general points about village communities all over India, before proceeding to describe Rampura, a village community in Mysore. Earlier writers like Maine distinguished between two types of villages in India—the “joint” and the “severalty”. The first type prevails in

\* See the author's later essay, “The Social System of a Mysore Village” in *Village India*, ed. by McKim Marriott (Chicago, 1955).



the North-West Frontier Province, the Punjab, and the United Provinces, and the second in Peninsular and Central India. The latter type also existed in Bengal and Bihar before the introduction of Permanent Settlement in 1793. The "joint" type may be further sub-divided into the *pattidari* and *zamindari* sub-types, in both of which the village lands constitute the joint property of an organized proprietary body. But while in the *pattidari* system the joint families constituting the proprietary body own separate shares in the cultivable land and hold the waste and pasture lands in common, in the *zamindari* system, all land is held and managed in common, and not divided. In the latter sub-type, the tenants, if any, are tenants of the whole body of proprietors, their rents and other receipts are paid into a common fund from which the common expenses are met; and the annual profits are divided among the co-sharers according to their respective shares. In a "joint" village, there are two classes of men, one with proprietary rights, the other without them, power resting exclusively with the former.

In the "severalty" or *ryotwari* village, a type which prevails over the greater part of India, the unit for land revenue is not the village, but the holding of each land-holder, which is separately assessed, and each land-holder is individually responsible for its payment. There is no waste land held in common which can be divided if required for cultivation, though there may be common rights of use in the waste, e.g., for grazing, and for collecting fuel.

A feature of the village community all over India is the *panchāyat* or council of elders which decides disputes between villagers, and discusses matters of common interest such as holding a festival and building a temple or road.

The nature of the village community is much better realised if we disregard for a moment the development of communications and the increase in administrative centralisation of the last 150 years or more. Before this happened village communities were far more isolated than they are today. A man's effective contacts and relations, one imagines, normally stopped a few miles from his natal village. A distant pilgrimage or a journey to a cattle fair, were probably the only occasions



when an individual ventured beyond the range of his normal contacts. And even then, he was often accompanied by his friends and relatives. Groups of relatives and friends moved a considerable distance only when there were compelling reasons such as a famine, war, or religious persecution by a prince professing a different faith.

The overall political authority does not seem to have been much more than a tax-collecting body in its relations with these villages. As long as a village paid its taxes and no great crime was committed in it, it was allowed to go its way. If we exclude for a moment the hereditary headman of the village and the hereditary accountant who are primarily members of the village community discharging certain duties for the government, officials of the government rarely visited the village. The elders in Rampura told me that even as recently as fifty years ago a policeman was a rare sight in their village, only 22 miles from the capital of the State of Mysore and on a bus road. Formerly every village had its own watch and ward, and this continues in certain villages even today.

Nobody can fail to be impressed by the isolation and stability of these village communities. Some of the early British administrators have left us their impressions of the village community. Sir Charles Metcalfe wrote in 1832: "The village communities are little republics, having nearly everything they want within themselves, and almost independent of any foreign relations. They seem to last where nothing else lasts. Dynasty after dynasty tumbles down; revolution succeeds revolution . . . , but the village community remains the same. . . . This union of village communities, each one forming a separate little state in itself, has, I conceive, contributed more than any other cause to the preservation of the people of India, through all the revolutions and changes which they have suffered, and is in a high degree conducive to their happiness, and to the enjoyment of a great portion of freedom and independence."<sup>1</sup>

All over India, excluding Bengal, Assam, and parts of Gujarat, and the west coast of southern India, the village is a cluster of houses and huts with the fields lying all round.

<sup>1</sup> *Report of the Select Committee of the House of Commons, 1832, Vol. III, Appendix 84, p. 331.*

Narrow, uneven winding streets run between rows of houses, thatched, or roofed with tiles made presumably by the local potter. The village occupies a very restricted area—Rampura is a somewhat large village, containing 1,523 inhabitants and yet one can go round it in about half an hour.

Every villager knows most of the other members of the village. Every one belongs to a caste, is a member of a joint family, and of the agnatic-kin-group which is made up of a few joint families. A man's idiosyncracies are common property. Adults are aware of the "history" of almost every joint family in the village. A relation between two persons seems to be a continuity from a relationship between their parents, and leads to a relationship between their children. One occasionally comes across instances where the past animosity between two joint families acts as a bond between their present representatives.

The headman of the village, commonly called the *Patel*, and the accountant, *Shānbhog*, are key figures in the community. They both belong to the village and their offices are hereditary. The headman is usually a non-Brahmin, whereas the accountant is invariably a Brahmin. The headman represents the village to the government and *vice versa*. His dual position of agent of the government and representative of his village gives him the respect of all. He is an indispensable go-between. While the government regards him as one who can be held responsible for the village, the villagers regard him as their spokesman. Till recently, the government seems to have been regarded with awe by the villagers. Only the boldest seem to have remained in the village when a high government official visited it—perhaps such a visit was undertaken only when something was seriously wrong in the village. The need of a spokesman is better appreciated when we remember these facts.

The accountant keeps a register of how much land each head of a family or joint family has, and the amount of tax on the land. Just before harvest the accountant reports to the government the state of the crops. He usually sends his report in the form, "the harvest will be 8 annas in the rupee this year". The government's assessment will be adjusted to this



estimate, after the accountant's estimate has been checked by a higher official.

The village is a unity in several senses of the term. It is, firstly, a physical unity. If the monsoon fails, it fails for everyone. Formerly, when there was an attack of cholera or plague or small-pox, the entire village acted as one, and moved away to a different place. (The present site of Rampura is only about seventy-five years old, the old site having been abandoned during an epidemic of malaria.) They all joined together to propitiate the deities presiding over these diseases. The disease was ritually driven out of the village—the village boundary has a certain ritual significance.

This ritual unity of the village is important. During the early part of the summer of 1948 there was a long drought and this adversely affected the summer crops, horse gram, black gram, green gram, etc. The villagers felt that they were being punished by God. Some attributed the drought to the fact that the priest of the Basava temple, an old widower, was living with two women to whom he was not married. The rains are liable to fail for other reasons too: burial of a leper's corpse leads to defilement of Mother Earth (*Bhumitai*), and this results in a drought. A leper's corpse has to be cremated, or floated down a river.

There was a striking demonstration of village unity during my stay. The government suddenly passed an order to the effect that henceforward fishing rights in tanks all over the State would be sold by auction. When Rampura people learnt of it, their spontaneous reaction was "What right has the government to auction fishing rights in *our* tank?" The government was, according to them, encroaching on something that belonged to them. (It must be mentioned here that in Rampura, once every year, during the height of summer, when water is at the lowest, the headman and elders organize a fishing expedition. At night, by moonlight, most of the adults go with fishing baskets to the tank and catch fish. Next day there is a feast in every house.) On the day fixed for auction, the villagers saw to it that nobody in the village or from any of the neighbouring villages was there to bid. The visiting government official had to return without an auction.



This sense of unity is also usually seen when the villagers contrast themselves with others. Rampura people consider themselves refined compared to Bihalli people. They concede that Kere people are more educated than themselves, but they say that they are quarrelsome, and do not co-operate with others for constructive tasks. On the other hand, Kere people regard themselves as advanced, and consider Rampura backward. Pride in one's village is common, though this does not completely shut out objectivity.

Occasionally we find two villages fighting each other. There is a Madeshwara (a form of Shiva) temple two furlongs from Rampura, and every year, in the month of *Kartik* (October-November), there is a festival in honour of this deity. People from within a radius of about twenty miles come to this festival. Parties of devotees from surrounding villages come and carry an image of the deity round the temple. It is customary to allow each party to carry the image three times round the temple. In 1947, a party from Kere was intercepted by a party from Bihalli soon after the former had completed the second round. Kere people said they wanted to complete the three rounds. Bihalli people replied that a great many people were waiting, and there was no time for the customary three rounds. A fight ensued, in which a Kere youth was injured. Soon Kere people massed up for a fight, and started moving towards Rampura. The police then intervened, fired a few rounds in the air, and were able to prevent the fight from assuming serious proportions.

Bihalli people felt uncomfortable after the festival was over. They knew that Kere people would try to avenge themselves. So they wanted to come to a settlement. They reported their desire for settlement to the headmen of Rampura and Hogur—in the latter is an important *panchāyat*<sup>1</sup> for the settlement of disputes. Kere people were asked to be present in Hogur on a certain day for the settlement of the dispute. They refused to comply with the request. Kere has a *panchāyat* of the same standing as Hogur, and people thought that it was a slight for them to be summoned to Hogur. Finally it was agreed that the parties concerned should meet in the Madeshwara temple

<sup>1</sup> The *panchāyats* referred to in this article are traditional and unofficial.

itself. They met at last, and the battle took a legal turn. It was finally decided that Bihalli people had committed a wrong, and they reluctantly paid the fine imposed on them. They then went back to their village and fined heavily all the youths who had taken part in the fight. At both Kere and Bihalli, people were informed of the end of the dispute by beat of drum, with a stern warning that any one who did not heed the decision would be summarily dealt with by the village *panchāyat*.

I have said enough to show that unity of the village has several aspects. Most members of the village, whatever their caste, consider themselves to be villagers in certain contexts. There are seventeen sub-castes in Rampura. Each of these sub-castes has a distinctive tradition with strong ties with the same sub-caste in villages nearby. That is, the village is a vertical unity of many castes whereas caste is a horizontal unity, its alliances going beyond the village.

There is one aspect of the caste system which does not receive sufficient emphasis. All the various castes in a village are interdependent. This is seen in day-to-day matters, and is prominent on ritual and other important occasions. Any villager will tell, for instance, that at the wedding of a peasant, all the castes have to co-operate. The Brahmin is priest, the Carpenter puts up the pandal, the Goldsmith makes the ornaments, the Potter makes the pots, the Washerman supplies clean cloths for the bridal pair to walk on, the Barber shaves the groom, the Oilman supplies the oil for the lamps and cooking, the Shepherd provides wool for the sacred thread which is tied round the wrists of the bridal pair, Banajigas (traders) supply the provisions, the Medas (basket-makers) the baskets, and the Holeyā (Untouchable) performs menial tasks and makes a pair of sandals for the groom.

The Carpenter (he belongs to the caste of carpenters and blacksmiths, it is important to remember) makes the peasant's plough, and it is his duty to see that the peasant's agricultural implements are all in good repair. Each family he serves pays him annually a fixed amount of paddy and straw at the rice harvest. He also gets a share, a very small one though, in the grains that are grown during summer. The Washerman similarly washes the clothes of every family in the village,



except of families belonging to very low castes. The men of the Washerman's family wash the men's clothes, while the women members wash the women's clothes. A man considers it beneath him to wash a woman's clothes. The Washerman also has special duties and privileges on ritual occasions. He is paid annually in paddy and straw by every family he serves. The same holds good for the Potter and Barber.

The Oilman is not included in such traditional arrangements. The Brahmin and Lingāyat (non-Brahmin, Shaivite sect of south India) priests of three important temples in Rampura are also paid a small quantity of paddy and straw annually. But then each of these temples has been endowed with lands which the priestly families enjoy. The paddy and straw which they are paid in addition is said to be a contribution towards the daily rice-offerings which are made to the deities.

Formerly, in Rampura, it was customary for two families, one belonging to the upper caste and the other to the Untouchable caste, to be linked in a master-servant relationship. The servant was called the *halemaga* (old son) of the master. The servant family had certain duties on ritual and social occasions, e.g., at a wedding in the master's family, the servant had to present a pair of sandals to the bridegroom. The servant family was paid a quantity of paddy and straw at the harvest. In addition, it had the right to the carcass of any cow or bullock which died in the master's house.

Now-a-days, Untouchables are beginning to refuse to perform these and other tasks as they are considered to be degrading. But the upper castes want them to continue performing them, and there is friction.

Formerly, it seems that entire sub-castes occupying a very low position in the hierarchy were attached as *halemagas* to certain sub-castes occupying a high position relatively. Thus we find a man of a high caste saying that "formerly such-and-such sub-castes were *halemagas* to us. They are no longer so". Sometimes this relationship seems to have been purely nominal—as when a wandering sub-caste like the Garudigas (caste of acrobats and magicians) are *halemagas* to a sub-caste in any village. The Garudigas might visit this particular village once



a year only. Sometimes a man might claim a sub-caste higher than his own as *halemaga* in order to boost his own sub-caste.

Servants cultivating their masters' lands are paid in paddy or paddy-cum-money, and tenants pay their landlords a fixed amount of grain or share of the crop. Paddy occupies to a large extent the place of money in the economy, and barter occurs even today in individual transactions.<sup>1</sup> But money is being used more and more.

The village is even today largely self-sufficient. But now-a-days there is a need for goods made, or grown outside, the village: cloths, salt, sugar, matches, kerosene, soap, tea, coffee, *beedis*, lanterns, cycles and safes are some of the goods that come from outside. A self-sufficient economy is possible only if each sub-caste adheres to its traditional occupations. The occupations are complementary. This is true to a great extent in Rampura even today, though every caste has agriculture either as its main occupation, or practises agriculture along with its main occupation. The members of the Peasant caste practise agriculture, the Barber shaves, the Washerman washes clothes, the Potter makes pots, the Banajigas are traders, the Gāniga works the oil-press and sells oil, the Besthas are fishermen, the Idigas sell toddy, though they no longer tap it, the Medas make baskets, and the Koramas are swine-herds. The Untouchables are labourers and servants.

But most of the Kurubas are agriculturists though their traditional occupation is keeping sheep and making woollen blankets. There are a few Muslims in Rampura who are recent immigrants, and they are traders and contractors.

A few Peasants and a Lingāyat have opened grocery shops, and a Potter and a Fisherman sew clothes on a sewing machine. The priestly castes also cultivate land. But even today it is considered proper to follow one's traditional occupation. (This view, however, does not obtain among many of the younger people who have been to school and who are urban in their outlook.)

<sup>1</sup> The role of barter has increased, in certain spheres, in the post-war years which have been characterised by acute shortage of rice. For instance, vegetable-sellers refuse cash, and sell only for rice.

A caste has a ritual attitude towards the tools, implements or objects associated with its occupation. Annually, at the festival of Gouri (Pārvati, wife of Shiva) each caste worships its tools. Books are identified with Saraswathi, the goddess of learning, and every one has ritual respect for them. The Brahmins worship books during the Dasara. It is customary to perform Saraswathi Puja in the village school during Dasara.

The entire community, composed of all the Hindu castes, regard the earth, as Mother Earth, a deity, and the crops and manure are regarded as Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth. The domestic lamp, granary, a heap of grain, grain-measure, etc., are all objects of ritual respect.

The various sub-castes in a village are interdependent economically and otherwise, and they see themselves as villagers in certain contexts, but these do not prevent inter-caste rivalry and even hostility. This is the natural corollary of caste solidarity. Inter-caste rivalry expresses itself in joking about the custom and habits of the castes of which one is not a member. Along with pride in one's own caste, there goes an ignorance of, and often contempt for, the ways and custom of other castes. The upper castes tend to be specially contemptuous of the ways of the lower castes.

Occasionally there are fights between sub-castes. Recently Fishermen and Lingāyats fought each other in a village near Rampura. Both Fishermen and Lingāyats are credited with a great deal of caste-solidarity.

It is reported that there are villages in which stones have been planted to mark the boundary of a caste. A man who finds himself on the wrong side of the boundary might be beaten. It is necessary to mention here, even though it means digressing, that there is another type of solidarity besides those of kinship, caste and village. The various sub-castes in a village are grouped into two divisions, viz., Nādu and Desha. It is not very easy to discover which sub-castes belong to the Nādu division and which to the Desha. One version is that Brahmins, Kshatriyas and Okkaligas belong to the Nādu whereas all the castes which usually have the suffix Shetti (from Sanskrit "Sreshti", "elect") belong to the Desha division.



Thus, the Banajiga (Trader), Washerman, Potter, Oilman, Barber, Fisherman, Weaving castes, Basket-makers and Swine-herds belong to the Desha. It is thus seen that all the trading and artisan castes belong to the Desha division. The Okkaligas or Peasants certainly belong to the Nādu, but one is not so certain about the Brahmin and Kshatriya. Perhaps the Brahmin was extraneous to the village in this matter, as he certainly is in some others.

It is relevant to introduce another matter here: the Smith group of castes are said to have "one colour less" than the others. Formerly this group suffered from certain civic disabilities. Their weddings were not permitted to be performed inside the village. They were excluded from village assemblies, prayer parties and marriage houses. They were not allowed to wear red slippers. No other caste, not even the Holeyas, the right-hand division of Untouchables, dined at the house of a Smith. It is usual to say that the Holeyas are the lowest caste. But there are castes to which the Holeyas do point and say that he does not eat food cooked by them, or drink water given by them or even borrow *chunam* (lime paste for betel leaves).

An attempt by the Smiths to assert their equality with the others usually led to a fight between them and others. Fifty years ago, the Cheluvadi (Untouchable, hereditary servant of the village, belonging to the right-hand division) of Kere beat a wealthy Smith from Mysore who walked into the village wearing red slippers. The Smith was rich and had lent money to the extent of Rs. 50,000 to the villagers.

Perhaps the grouping of castes into those "with one colour less" coincides with the grouping of castes into right-hand and left-hand divisions. The Smiths certainly belong to the latter. Of the Untouchables, the Holeyas belong to the right-hand, while the Madigas belong to the left-hand division; formerly, a fight usually arose when a left-hand caste tried to assert a privilege which was denied to it by the right-hand division.

The village has a solidarity even though composed of several different castes. Each caste again has a solidarity cutting across the village. Thirdly, the various castes living in a village can be grouped into Nādu and Desha divisions. This distinction,



like the "full-colours" and "one-colour-less" division, and the right-hand and left-hand division, is a general distinction among castes in this area, and not confined to the castes of one village.

We must now mention the existence of caste-courts, which punish people guilty of caste offences. They are even today powerful organisations though the legal system introduced by the British has adversely affected them. For instance, a person who has been excommunicated by a caste-court can sue it in a court of law for defamation. But in spite of the inroads made into the authority of caste-courts, the latter continue to function. Even as recently as 1945, there was an instance of a woman of the Washerman caste who was very nearly thrown out of caste because of alleged inter-dining with a sister who had been thrown out of caste some time previously for living with an Untouchable.<sup>1</sup> Excommunication from caste is the most powerful weapon in the hands of caste-courts. It can be final and irrevocable, or temporary. The former is for very grave offences like living with a very low caste man, or repeatedly eating with him. The milder punishment is for smaller offences: the offender expresses regret for his action, pays a fine, undergoes purificatory ritual after which he gives a feast to the members of his caste. When one is excommunicated for good, he is as good as dead to his caste which stops all social intercourse with him. A notice is often circulated which makes it impossible for the wretched man to settle elsewhere. If the offender is the head of a family, the entire family comes under the ban, unless they disown him.

At a wedding, betel leaves and nuts are distributed to all the assembled guests. This distribution has to take place in a certain order. It has to take into account the qualifications of each guest. The wedding guests are very touchy on the question of precedence, and if a guest feels that he has been dishonoured, he creates a scene. The formal distribution of betel leaves is such a hazardous affair, that several years ago the elders of Rampura decided that anybody could drop it if he paid Rs. 8-4 into the village fund. Now-a-days most take advantage of this means of escape.

<sup>1</sup> I have discussed this dispute elsewhere.

There are caste-courts for the Potters at Keragodu and Ashtagrama. These courts are called *gadi* which literally means frontier or boundary. Each caste has several caste-courts and they are said to constitute a hierarchy. But the hierarchy does not seem to be clear. For instance, there is a keen rivalry between Keragodu *gadi* and Mysore *gadi*. The Mysore people claim precedence over Keragodu on the ground that they represent the *gadi* of the capital of Mysore State. To this the Keragodu people reply that this *gadi* came into existence during the time of Hyder Ali, father of Tipu Sultan, and even then Keragodu had precedence over Ashtagrama, the then capital of Mysore State—that is to say, Keragodu has always enjoyed precedence over the capital.<sup>2</sup>

Two years ago, representatives of the Potter caste in Mysore started claiming precedence over Keragodu representatives in villages such as Kere, Pura and Kadlāgāla. In none of the places did they have any success. But in Tagadur *gadi* they were successful in pressing their claim.

Again, Kere *gadi* claims to include under it Keragodu *gadi*, but the latter considers itself to be a separate *gadi* and not merely part of Kere. It is said that formerly Potters had 48 *gadis*, and at a wedding in a Potter's house, 48 betels had to be kept aside, irrespective of the fact that only a few of the 48 representatives were present. In Kere village this custom was stopped only a few years ago, and now-a-days only those actually present receive betel leaves.

The ritual of betel distribution at a wedding reflects the village organisation, and also reveals the existence of a hierarchy of caste-courts. Sometimes, the hierarchy is not clear, and one of the reasons for this may be the fact that a caste-court which is supreme in one area tries to assert its authority in a different area.

Certain matters fall clearly within the jurisdiction of a caste-court, e.g., dining or living with a member of a low caste. Matters like lopping off the branches of some one else's tree,

<sup>2</sup> History-books attribute the division of the State into 84 *gadis* to Chikka Deva Raja Wadiyar (1672-1704), during whose reign was dug the well-known irrigation canal which bears his name. Hyder Ali ruled Mysore between 1761-82.



diverting water belonging to another's field, stealing grass from a field, setting fire to hay-ricks, etc., fall within the jurisdiction of village authorities who are armed with powerful sanctions, ranging from fines to boycott of the offender. The offender who has been boycotted (and his family) lose access to the village tank or canal. His cattle will not be allowed to graze on the village pasture. The barber, washerman, etc., will not serve him. No neighbour will offer the offender "fire and hot water". Even today in the village it is common to light a stove from the embers taken from a neighbour's stove. Similarly, hot water for bathing or washing is borrowed from a neighbour if the neighbour has a cauldron of hot water.

Village and caste authorities normally work together. Sometimes the former may tell the disputants, "You take the matter up to your caste authorities". Again, the caste-authorities consult the village authorities when a question of fact is involved—the latter are the men on the spot and know the parties to, and sometimes the facts as well, of the dispute.

In Rampura, as far as the Okkaligas (peasants, there are 735 of them) are concerned, there is a caste headman (Nādu Gauda) in the village to whom they can take their disputes. The village headman (Patel) is also an Okkaliga, and he and the caste headman are great friends. Each supports the other in almost all matters. The result is that disputes from Rampura Okkaligas rarely go out of the village. In fact, Rampura people are well-known for their love of peace.

Both the village headman and the headman of the Okkaliga caste are well-to-do, and have a reputation for being fair-minded. This normally ensures the settling of disputes within the village. Also, the two headmen refrain from trying to exercise their authority in disputes in which certain people well-known for their quarrelsomeness are involved. The latter take their disputes to the law courts.

The headman of the Okkaliga caste in Rampura is also frequently called in to settle disputes of non-Okkaligas, disputes which clearly lie within the jurisdiction of the respective caste authorities. For instance, the case of a Kuruba (Shepherd) girl of Rampura, who did not want to join her husband, was taken before the Okkaliga caste-headman. The reputation of a

leader for fairness often might induce people of other castes to take their disputes to him.

Every political leader and every official who comes into direct contact with villagers, complains about "party politics" in the village. Every village is divided into factions; and each faction is headed by a leader. These factions prevent the working of the village as a unit.

The village is an interdependent unit, largely self-sufficient, having its own village assembly, watch and ward, officials and servants. Inside each village each caste lives its own life, though it is dependent on other castes within and without the village. There is also a division along class lines. The Untouchables are never wealthy, and they are usually servants and labourers at the houses of the upper castes. But there are also poor members of the upper castes who act as servants to rich members of their own caste. Thus a poor Okkaliga often becomes the servant of a rich Okkaliga. Usually an upper caste man never becomes a servant at the house of a man who belongs to a much lower caste.

Enough evidence has been produced to indicate the kind of ties that bind together the members of the village community. These ties are strong and traditional. But the forces set in motion in the last hundred and fifty years have been such as to weaken them, and the arrival of Independence has marked a concentrated effort to snap these ties. What kind of village community will come to exist in the future, can only be a matter for speculation.



## A Village in Rajasthan:

G. Morris Carstairs

## A Study in Rapid Social Change

IN HIS "Study of a Mysore Village", Dr. Srinivas has outlined those features of village social structure which can be recognised in almost every part of India. His particular instances were cited from the South, but such features as the relative status and the mutual interdependence of castes, the village and caste *pañchāyats*, the inheritance of land—all these are equally applicable to the villages in Rajasthan.

When one looks closer, however, the regional characteristics become apparent. This was so, in a literal sense, from the very first day of my recent ten months' stay in an Udaipur village, which I shall call Fatehpura. From the road, which winds among the foothills of the Aravallis, all that one sees of Fatehpura is a towering white-washed palace, set on a high rock and girt about with fortified walls. At the foot of the rock, there is a jumble of roofs and trees. As one walks along the village lane, however, one comes upon the main street, and it boasts a neat symmetrical bazaar of about a hundred shops. At its far end, this street joins the rock-strewn drive which leads up to the palace.

Up till four years ago, the village was dominated by the palace not only physically, as it still is, but in every sphere of its social life. Fatehpura was the seat of a major Jāgirdār of Udaipur, the semi-independent ruler of a considerable tract of land granted to his forefathers by Rana Pratap. The halls and courtyards of the palace swarmed with officials; it was the centre of revenue collecting; it contained civil and criminal magistrates' courts, and police headquarters, and a small jail. The village dispensary was housed there and the school and travellers' *dharmashala* were also provided by the Jāgirdār.

In addition to these functional activities, the palace was the hub of the social life of all the countryside. The lesser jāgirdārs each took their turn to wait upon the prince, and once a year, at Dashera or on the occasion of his birthday, they would

attend his formal *darbar*, to present a silver rupee in *nazarana*, as token of their loyalty. Not only Rajputs came in this way, but many others, Brahmins, Banias and Muslims as well, whose families held hereditary *jāgirs* from the prince. No major business undertaking was engaged in without the approval of the ruler. In their approach to him, the strictest etiquette must be obeyed; no informality of dress or of deportment could be permitted in his presence. When the prince went abroad from his palace, on horse or elephant-back, or in one of his fine cars, all bystanders bowed low as he passed clasping their hands and calling out "*Kamān, Andāta*"—"Hail, Giver of Grain!"

Every day, the courts of the palace swarmed with people—lawyers and magistrates, litigants and rent-collectors, servants and visitors of the ruler. As a result of all this traffic, trade grew steadily; old men can remember when all the village houses were roofed with home-made tiles; now the entire bazaar is made of solid stone-roofed houses, and narrow lanes run off on either side to the big two-storied *hawelis* where the merchants' families live. At first, the only people of consequence in the village were those with responsible positions in the prince's court, and all the young men competed for employment there; but with time, a number of businessmen began to acquire quite large fortunes in their own right.

The *jāgirdārs* like to think of those old days, when their authority was supreme and unchallenged as if they were a golden age; but in fact, their arbitrary rule was not invariably benevolent, nor always popular. It was subject to the corruptions of absolute power. At times the ruler's rough justice was more rough than just, especially when he saw that he could enrich himself by imposing a heavy fine, or by resuming grants of land back into his own possession. It was dangerous for any one to criticise the *status quo*; the early spokesmen for Congress and its ideals of social reform were beaten and imprisoned and their lives were threatened by the ruler's servants. The *droit de seigneur* was frequently invoked when a handsome village girl caught the ruler's eye, and here again it was dangerous to oppose his will.

One injustice against which pioneer Congress workers worked for years was the imposition of forced labour upon the



poorest of the ruler's subjects. It was this, more than anything else, which aroused resentment among the peasantry. In time a settlement was made with the arbitration of a senior administrative officer from Udaipur; fixed rents were substituted for the compulsory service to the prince. Civil revolt was averted, but this victory over the absolute rule of the prince was not forgotten. Today, when the *jāgirdārs* protest against the abolition of their privileges, they are uneasily aware that many of their peasants are not sorry to see their fall from power. On the other hand there are still many who regret the passing of the old order. In a countryside where communications are primitive and literates are in a small minority, there is a lot to be said for an autocratic rule, if it is responsibly carried out—and the *jāgirdārs*, in a fitful fashion, did aspire to be good and well-liked rulers. When they found their servants practising flagrant corruption, they punished them at once, and dramatically. In times of famine, which recur in Rajasthan, the ruler counted it his duty to distribute food from his own stores. And besides this, their regime had the advantage of direct personal association, continuing from generation to generation of the families of the ruler and his subjects.

Today, the scene is very different. The palace stands practically empty, with none of the hustle of the old days. Its magistrate's court is closed; the revenue officers' headquarters are elsewhere; the police-station, the hospital, the school are all Government-run now. Instead of being beset by the responsibilities of administration, the prince now sits unoccupied, talking to a few personal servants, looking out from a high window which overlooks all the activities of the village, listening to the gossip of the bazaar. At the gateways of the palace, a skeleton staff still mounts guard, day and night; those who watch in the *darikhana* strike the hours on a brass gong, and the sound is repeated by the watchman at the front gate. The sound is heard all over the village, and its work is still regulated by "palace-time"; but this is all that remains of its once commanding influence over all their lives.

The prince seldom goes abroad now, and when he does, he notices that now many villagers stand sourly watching as his limousine goes by—only the old-fashioned and those who are

still his servants, now bow down and cry out the old greeting. Now, people seldom come to consult him on their plans, or to present their sons to him; the younger generation resents the formality of court dress and courtly obsequiousness.

The centre of local government has moved, and resides in a town a dozen miles away where the Tehsildār and the magistrates have their offices; and these are fickle authorities subject to postings at a moment's notice. The villagers have not yet learned how to adapt themselves to all this; but they are keenly aware of the loss of prestige, of traffic, and of business that has followed the deposition of the palace rule.

Slowly, over the last four years, the villagers of Fatehpura have begun to adapt themselves to the new order or rather, to the disappearance of the old. Formerly, the hierarchy of jāgirdārs and of greater and lesser officers of the palace set the scale against which every one could ascertain his own social standing. Now that scale has gone and a general reassessment is taking place. The village has taken stock of itself once more, and its inventory is roughly as follows.

Preponderating in numbers, are the Mahajans, the merchant caste, of Jain religion. They have 150 households out of a total population (in 1951) of 2,750 persons. It is they who operate nearly all the shops in the main bazaar, and among them are some of the richest members of the community and also one or two of the poorest pedlars and petty craftsmen who earn only a few annas a day, and are denied the resource of begging by reason of their caste.

The two next largest groups are the Yadavs and Darogas, each living in its own quarter of the village. These communities are both formerly despised low-caste groups, which have during the present generation begun to claim a higher social standing. The Yadavs did so by abandoning their traditional leather-work for stone-masonry, and for the levelling experience of factory employment. The Darogas were once a slave caste, servants of the rulers. Now they are striking out in many new activities such as keeping tea-shops, cycle-stores, and seeking employment in the towns. Both these castes now frequently adopt the surname "Singh". Like many other of the lowly castes of Rajasthan, they like to call themselves "Rajputs",



though this claim is indignantly repudiated by the "true" Rajputs, of ancient lineage.

Brahmin households are relatively few—20 in all. They, like the colony of 40 Mussalman households, were nearly all dependent on the palace. Now, the older Brahmins still find a living attending to the ritual occasions of the village families, but their younger sons without exception aspire to get educated and take a job in town. The Mussalmans are badly hit by the changed days. Some have become odd jobmen for the richer merchants, a few remain at very low wages among the skeleton staff of the Palace.

The poorest groups in the village are to be found in the quarters occupied by the Khatiks (butchers and farm labourers), the potters and the Bhils who in this village are almost all landless labourers. Other splinter groups, the tailors and barbers, sweetmeat sellers and goldsmiths, are not so badly off.

Normally, in the new order of things, the chief authority in the village is the democratically elected village *pañchāyat*, and the village's first citizen is the Sirpanch. In fact, however, this body has not yet gained the citizen's respect and confidence. Perhaps one reason is that the Hindu villager's genius is anti-pathetic to ways of ordering things which are too cut and dried, precise, impersonal. Significantly, in the old days a *pañchāyat* never consisted of five, or seven or any defined number of men; nor was there a recognised spokesman. Each dispute was a new crisis within a small sub-section of the community, to be decided on its merits by those senior members who were most intimately concerned—and not by rigid law or precedent.

Similarly, one has the feeling that the village as a whole, in scores of unrelated informal *pañchāyats* is beginning to formulate its group attitude towards the changing order; and in the process, it is noticeable that one or two forceful characters emerge as the men that matter in the village. All of them are above the average in wealth, but it is not only that—four of the richest men in the village (a Punjabi, a *darzi*, a Sheikh and a Bania: all moneylenders) refrain altogether from taking part in public affairs.

During this period of flux, also, a major feud has developed between two factions of banias, and it is becoming increasingly

difficult for the ordinary citizen to prevent his being drawn into one side or the other. The dispute began over a struggle as to which faction should get control of the sale of rationed cloth; it has gone on to quarrels, fights, law-suits, "rigging" of the village *panchāyat* elections—and it seems to gather momentum as it goes.

Congress teaching, and social reforms in general, have never received a very warm reception in this conservative community. At present the chief spokesmen for the new order are young men, who scandalise their elders by violating the old caste restrictions, and by daring to defend the reforms of the Hindu Code Bill. Their speeches and propaganda would be better received by the under-privileged castes, were it not that their own record of behaviour has been conspicuously discreditable. Thus Fatehpura, like so many villages in Rajasthan, seems to lag behind the rest of the country in recognising the social and economic changes which are spreading all over India. Yet there is one factor which is already operating to change this backwardness. During the last four years, more than ever before, many of the young men of the village have had to go abroad to seek work. When they come back, they are outspokenly critical of many of the old ways. They repudiate the last vestiges of kowtowing to the feudal overlords; they teach their caste-fellows city ways of asserting themselves against the rich—already the cobblers have gone on strike to assert their demand for a fair price for their work.

In the present lacuna left by the disappearance of the old regime, a few strong self-interested men are asserting their personal authority; but so far, it is a tentative assertion—they are like wrestlers circling round each other warily in the ring—and all the while the disinherited *jāgirdārs* look on, grudging the loss of their former pre-eminence.

As I have tried to indicate, in a complex, reciprocally interacting community like this big village, the emergence of leaders, of social sanctions and of new social forms of expression of opinion cannot be accomplished by act of parliament, however well thought out. It is an organic process, the product of a multitude of thrusts and stresses. In Fatehpura, as in villages all over Rajasthan, the process is going on apace.



Eric J. Miller

## Village Structure in North Kerala

PROFESSOR M. N. Srinivas prefaced his excellent article on "The Social Structure of a Mysore Village," published in *The Economic Weekly* of October 30, 1951, with an account of the chief types of village organization in India. Although the presence of caste probably reduces the possible types to a finite number, local variations in the caste system, in the proportion of the non-Hindu population, in economy, in topography, and in other factors, have all contributed to produce considerable differences in different regions. Prominent among the factors that have distinguished the Malabar Coast from the rest of India in this respect are its relative isolation between the Western Ghats and the sea, its unique and formerly very strong gradation of castes, and its division into powerful, if fluid, chiefdoms, some of which survive vestigially today.

Even within the area, the manner in which village communities are organized varies considerably between one locality and the next. No attention is paid in this article to the many predominantly Muslim (Mappila) communities in the southern taluks of Malabar district, nor to the villages in Travancore and Cochin where Syrian Christians are in a majority. These require separate treatment. Despite the uniform administration through village officials which has been superimposed over the whole of Malabar district and Cochin State, with but minor discrepancies, there nevertheless remain appreciable variations in structure even among overwhelmingly Hindu villages. An attempt is made here to provide a general picture of village structure in North Kerala, rather than to concentrate on the detailed organization of a single village.

A broad distinction may be drawn between the northern part of Malabar district (briefly referred to as North Malabar) on the one hand, and Cochin State together with the southern taluks of Malabar district (South Malabar) on the other. This

is partly connected with the formerly greater autonomy of local chieftains and headmen in the north, where the terrain is more hilly and the villages more scattered and isolated, in contrast to the thicker settlement of the rice-growing areas in the south. The southern village is often an "island" of houses and trees surrounded by a "sea" of paddy. In the north the paddy-fields more frequently resemble lakes or rivers—indeed they often tend to be long narrow strips, irrigated from a central stream,—with the houses hidden among the trees on the surrounding slopes.

Instead of living huddled in a street, as so many other Indians do, the Malayali prefers the privacy of his own fenced compound, at a distance from his neighbours. The density of palm trees, plantains, and other vegetation often renders one house invisible from the next. In localities where paddy-fields are few, settlement of this kind may be continuous for miles in one direction or another, with no obvious territorial boundaries to individual villages. Even the poorest house-holder of the lowest caste lives a little apart from his neighbours and kin, though often on a perimeter of the village or close to the fields. With this exception, settlement is usually haphazard, with no special tendency for houses of a particular caste to cluster together.

It is necessary here to give some account of the more important caste divisions of North Kerala. Of the four *varnas*, there are practically no Kshatriyas and few, if any, indigenous Vaisya castes: the bulk of the population comprises Sudras and Untouchables.

Nambudiri Brahmans are a small but important patrilineal (*makkathāyam*) caste at the top of the Hindu scale. Titularly the priests of the community, many of them are also wealthy landlords. Ranking ritually below them, but economically as powerful or more so, are various chieftain castes who are *marumakkathāyam*, reckoning descent through the female line. One or two of them claim Kshatriya rank and precedence among them is constantly in dispute. All of them, separately and together, are normally exogamous, giving their women in marriage to Nambudiris while their men take wives from Nayars—the large matrilineal group of castes which form, so to



speak, the middle-class backbone of the society. Traditionally soldiers, and today often in government service, the Nayers are primarily farmers. Ranking slightly above Nayers are some small castes of temple servants. The lowest Nayar sub-castes are washermen and barbers for all higher groups.

All these are caste-Hindus, and from the chieftain castes down all are Sudras. This latter group shares what is in many respects a common culture, made the more uniform by the system of hypergamy, by which men of the higher castes and sub-castes took wives from groups below them—a practice now being superseded by a greater degree of endogamous marriage. The marriage links of the chieftain castes (and sometimes of the superior Nayers) with the Nambudiris forged some kind of unity among all caste-Hindus.

Nayers comprise about one quarter of the Hindu population, and the other caste-Hindus less than ten per cent; the remaining two-thirds are polluting castes. These fall into two broad groups. The upper group includes a populous caste of labourers and small tenants, known, in different regions, as Tiyyas or Iravas, together with lesser castes of carpenters, smiths, physicians, washermen, etc. Below these are many inferior polluting castes of basketmakers, cobblers, and other artisans, musicians, devil-dancers, beggars, and, most numerous, landless labourers who were formerly agrestic serfs.

Within the village, caste rank was—and still is—closely correlated with relationship to the land, especially paddy-land. In North Malabar the headman family of the village sometimes still remains the chief land-owner, while in the south the landlord may more often be a Nambudiri or a temple *devaswam*, in which case the headman family will have some freehold fields and hold the rest as a tenant. Although the headman family may till more than enough land for its own needs, the bulk of it is parcelled out among tenants, who may cultivate it themselves or sub-lease it yet again. Nambudiris and chieftain castes tend to be land-owners; the higher Nayar sub-castes are either land-owners or non-cultivating tenants (“customary *kānamdārs*”); the inferior Nayers and some Tiyyas are cultivating sub-tenants, either on permanent leases (“cultivating *kānamdārs*”) or on annual leases (*verumpattamdārs*); the majority

of upper polluting castes are landless labourers; while the lower polluting castes were until recently serfs, tied to a particular block of land, and, if the land was transferred, themselves automatically transferred to the new owner.

Since in a village there were scarcely any families which, at some time of the year, did not have a connection with the land—even if only to supply supplementary labour for the harvest,—this relationship to the land of the various social groupings was an important expression of their differential rank. The society also provided more detailed criteria of a ritual and occupational nature, which clarified the rank of each caste in relation to all others of the locality. Disputes over precedence between castes within a village are a novelty: formerly there existed no opportunity for social relations (except warlike relations) between individuals of castes whose mutual rank and corresponding behaviour were not accurately predetermined.

The village, containing a cross-section of interdependent castes (usually between 15 and 25), was more or less self-subsistent. The local members of each caste were united by kinship bonds. In spite of the hypergamy already mentioned, they were mainly endogamous. Each had its own internal administration under its more prominent elders, and in extent this organization was usually coterminous with the village, unless local membership of the caste was very small or very large. There was often a Nambudiri family which provided priests for the local temple, but it was the Nayar caste which held the political authority and economic control. The hereditary village-headship normally belonged to the wealthiest Nayar family (which was often of a slightly higher sub-caste than the others), and while all castes had some kind of authority over those below them it was the Nayar caste which was most concerned in maintaining local law and order.

Villages were grouped into petty states under higher chieftains, and these in turn often owed allegiance to most important rulers such as the Maharaja of Cochin and the Zamorin of Calicut. The size and importance of any territorial unit, from village upwards, was reckoned in terms of the number of able-bodied Nayar warriors it could supply. The ritual authority of Nambudiri Brahmans (who were partly superior to terrestrial



divisions) and the political authority of kings and chieftains acted as a check on each other. The Nayars, by the possibility of transferring allegiance to another ruler, could prevent chieftains from becoming too autocratic; but it was very seldom that the Nayar assemblies even threatened to apply this sanction.

The main structural cleavages were between territorial units—villages, chiefdoms, kingdoms—not between castes. Inter-caste relations were, on the contrary, of a complementary nature, involving traditionally ordained and clear-cut rights and obligations, authority and subordination. Juridical authority neatly coincided with political authority and economic power and the political and juridical authority of headmen and chieftains was also buttressed ritually by trusteeship of the chief temples in their area, and in certain other ways.

The village was the *deśam*; the headman was the *deśavari*. In the south the authority of the *deśavari* was somewhat curtailed by the strength of the Nayar assemblies, since he could take no action of which they disapproved without losing the allegiance of arms on which his position so greatly depended. He was to some extent *primus inter pares*. Though he was in charge of administering the village temple, it was only as chairman of a committee of hereditary trustees, also generally Nayars. Administration of justice consisted mainly in ratifying decisions of Nayar elders.

Every caste in the village, as we have seen, had some sort of internal organization through which internal disputes could be settled. In the lowest castes of serfs this was often inadequate, since there were and there remain cleavages between local factions owing allegiance to different landholders. Within the village there was a constant tendency for disputes unsettled inside the caste to be referred upwards to a caste higher in the scale. The large Tiyya caste had some responsibility for maintaining law and order among the lower castes, and a right to intercede in their disputes. The Tiyya elder of the village had to be present at weddings in the artisan castes, and he or his representative had to accompany the marriage procession if it went to another village. Individual Nayars (perhaps a landlord of one of the disputants) and the *deśavari*, if necessary, arbitrated in cases that Tiyyas failed to settle. Serious punishments

such as excommunication required the approval of the *desavari* (or, where higher castes were involved, of a superior ruler), who was also responsible for seeing that the punishment was properly carried out.

The consistency between this delegation of authority and distance pollution scarcely needs emphasis: whereas Nayers could not inconveniently settle Tiyya disputes at the statutory distance of 24 feet, the dispensation of justice to the lower serf castes at 64 feet would have been a less tractable problem. Approach of the lower castes closer than these distances was, of course, polluting to the Nayers.

Obviously there was scope in such a system for individual acts of oppression: the universal value of the society, that status was to be respected and defended, made them possible. Any sense of injustice, however, was felt only towards the individual who had exceeded his rights and was not extended to a cleavage between castes or between ruler and subject. As in all hierarchical systems of this kind, what was suffered from a superior could be inflicted on an inferior. An oppressor also had supernatural retribution to fear. Furthermore, the society was united by the common philosophy of *dharma*, that the greatest good is to behave according to one's station in life. If a man committed adultery with a woman of higher caste, for example, it was a threat to the *status quo* of the whole society. His own caste-fellows disapproved of his crime—indeed, sin—as strongly as the caste of the degraded woman. Excommunication was automatic for both. A family failing to disown such a delinquent member was itself liable to excommunication, but it would seldom refrain from holding the appropriate death ceremonies to cut off the sinner. In this way, the conservation of the way of life of each caste and of the whole village was a responsibility shared by every individual.

Since the British took over the administration of Malabar at the end of the eighteenth century, changes (foreshadowed during the Mysorean invasions of the preceding forty years) have been numerous and far-reaching. The large chieftain families were given political pensions in exchange for their former sovereignty, and the boundaries of the new administrative divisions only vaguely coincided with the old chiefdoms.



Such authority as the chiefs retained was a by-product of their economic ascendancy as great landlords and of their caste rank. The existence of a gradation of caste rank continues to be acknowledged, even though the correlated elements of differential political, juridical, and economic rank have in many cases been greatly blurred; and although caste is no longer the only factor determining social relations of superordination and subordination, it is still the most important one. Wealth and positions in government service provide new determinants of status, but they remain the preserves of the higher castes sufficiently to hinder the decline of caste rank as a determinant in itself.

These changes have affected villages as well as chiefdoms (*nāds*). For administrative purposes, Malabar district has been divided into taluks, firkas (areas used only in connection with collecting land revenue), *amśams*, and *deśams*. The so-called village headman (*adhigāri*) and accountant (*menon*) are in charge of an *amśam*. The *amśam* sometimes roughly coincides with a former *deśam* (i.e., the realm of a *deśavari*), but it is often larger; and the modern *deśam*, which is merely the smallest unit for revenue and survey purposes, has no official attached to it and is frequently only a small sector of a former *deśam*. In Cochin State administrative changes have been similar. The *village* (a word now used in the vernacular and equivalent to the Malabar *amśam*) is, however, the smallest unit, under the headship of a *pārvadyam*, and the *deśam*, though it exists as a subdivision of the *village*, is not recognized for official purposes. In Cochin also, groups of *villages* are assembled into *pañchāyats*.

It is important to recognize this distinction between the twentieth century *deśam* and the pre-British *deśam*. That the present-day *deśam* can generally be called, for sociological purposes, a village, with a recognizable community life of its own, is, I believe, mainly the result of the tremendous population increases during the last 150 years. Sectors of former *deśams* are now *deśams* in their own right, with their own separate temples, accepted leaders, and, in many cases, internally operative caste committees. In Cochin State, where officially the unit is unrecognized, and where an ancient *deśam* may now

have been carved into two or three separate villages, this process of fission is often clearer. One *deśam* in Central Cochin, for example, had consisted of four hamlets, spread out on the four sides of an important Bhadrakali temple. The whole locality was previously administered by the ecclesiastical commissioners of a larger temple *devaswam*, and for internal administrative purposes a joint committee of Nayers from the *deśam* replaced a *deśavari*. Growth of population, especially in the hamlet nearest to an expanding town, led to fission of the *deśam* into four smaller *deśams*. Each now has its own Nayar committee, and the annual festival at the Bhadrakali temple is organized by each *deśam* in turn, instead of being collectively organized by the four hamlets. Neither the incorporation of the four *deśams* as parts of three separate administrative villages, nor their former unity, affects the fact that each is now a separate village community.

In some areas, however, more particularly in North Malabar, either a smaller increase in population, or else surviving power of a hereditary *deśavari*, has hindered the development of modern *deśams* as relatively separate communities. There the *amśam*, coinciding with a former *deśam*, remains the social unit, held together by allegiance to the former *deśavari* family in spite of the fissiparous tendencies of the more recently created *deśams* into which it is nowadays divided.

One factor that has operated in many places to keep internal village structure relatively intact, despite sweeping changes in the broader political structure, has been the method of selecting candidates to become *adhigāris*. From the beginning, in addition to their primary duty of collecting revenue, they were empowered to try minor civil and criminal cases. Except where they had been obstructive, or had vanished in the turmoil of the Mysorean invasions and their aftermath, the hereditary *deśavaris* of the old system were the obvious candidates for the new posts. In most villages they were given these positions, on the implicit understanding that, subject to good behaviour the headship would remain vested in the family. Naturally there has been wastage, but in many villages the traditional *deśavari* family still supplies the *adhigāri*.



Important differences have arisen between such villages and those where the *adhigāri* is simply a low-ranking government employee with the appropriate residential and educational qualifications. In this latter type of village, if the headman family of the old system survives at all it has lost most of the economic and other sanctions behind its former authority and it has gained none of the new ones. Such a village is less of an entity and much more closely caught up in the groupings and cleavages of modern society.

In villages where the modern headship remains vested in the family that held it traditionally, there is a very different picture, more particularly in North Malabar. Certain powerful Nayar joint-families still hold sway over the several modern *desams* that make up their former single *desams*. The senior member of such a family is sometimes called *yajamānan*, or lord. Some of his ritual sanctions have lost their force. Under modern conditions there is less meaning, for example, in the right to exclude an offender from the village temple or to deprive a woman of *māttu* (a purificatory cloth with which higher caste women are supplied, after menstrual periods, by a low-caste washerwoman). The economic sanctions for his political and juridical authority nevertheless remain, and to these are added the sanctions issuing from his position in the modern administration. He thus derives power from two sources—downwards from the state and upwards from the village community.

It is his position as landlord, however, which seems to be the most compelling factor in his authority. In such a village the traditional sets of rights and obligations between castes and values of superiority and inferiority based on rank remain strong. The territorial loyalty which unifies the village community is much more potent than the conflicting modern loyalty to one's own caste over a wider area. The recent tendency elsewhere for lower castes to settle internal disputes internally, and thus to shake off dependence on higher castes, is much less noticeable in such villages: an upward reference of disputes for settlement is apparently as prevalent as ever and serves to bolster the ascendancy of the Nayars in general and of the *yajamānan* in particular. And in spite of the strong

Hindu-Muslim cleavage in India as a whole, quarrels within a local Muslim minority are not infrequently referred to the *yajamānan* for mediation.

There is a special interest in this aspect of the *yajamānan*'s functions. Disputes among Nayars and all lower castes tend to be referred either to leading Nayars or to the headman himself, in his capacity either as *yajamānan* or as *adhigāri*. Owing to the increasingly circumscribed official authority of the *adhigāri* and proliferation of his relatively menial duties, the post is now not one that the senior member of a wealthy family is usually willing to hold himself; it might indeed detract from his hereditary prestige. More often, therefore, it is given to a younger member of the family. This man's status, however, is defined by the villagers in terms rather of his family membership than of his official position, with the anomalous result that, if two disputants bring a case before him and one of them is dissatisfied with the verdict, an appeal is often made not to the next higher civil court but to the *yajamānan* himself, as senior member of the *adhigāri*'s family.

I have heard such a *yajamānan* speak as if he felt a moral obligation not to let disputes go outside the village to the courts for settlement. His method, he said, in stubborn cases, was "to induce a spirit of compromise by repeated adjournments". Settlements achieved within his domain are, of course, a constant implementation of his authority and prestige, and also an addition to his income, since unofficial litigants coming to him always bring gifts in kind. (This tribute is often given too when cases go before the *adhigāri*.) Apart from disputes over property, which form the majority of those which the *yajamānan* is called upon to settle, cases of assault, malicious damage to crops, trespass, etc., come before him and the fines he exacts often go into his own purse.

The *yajamānan* still usually has the authority to see that his decisions are carried out and to prevent cases from going to court. Since most disputants are tenants of his own family he holds the threat of eviction over their heads, while his retainers can resort to force if necessary. Even today pitched battles are occasionally fought between retainers of two *yajamānans* who both claim suzerainty over a marginal area.



Power of the northern *yajamānan's* family is implemented not only by its managing trusteeship of the village temple but by its ownership of a collection of shrines to local deities, whose propitiation often remains the most important local festival of the year. Like temple festivals, these exciting and colourful propitiation ceremonies require active co-operation of a wide range of castes—perhaps twenty—from the area of the *yajamānan's* authority. Certain families have the hereditary duty of supplying participants. Such a *yajamānan* also retains feudal rights and obligations at minor ceremonies, weddings, and so on.

All over North Kerala, the extent to which the various castes still play their traditional roles at the village temple festival indicates the extent to which the complementary interdependence of castes survives in the village. Temple entry (dating from 1947 in Malabar district and from 1948 in Cochin State) contradicts the principles of the temple festival, which was ritually an epitome of caste interdependence; temple entry gives all castes an equal right to visit all parts of the temple, whereas one of the cardinal functions of the temple festival is to express the differential rank of castes in terms of spatial distance—the lowest castes being those furthest removed from the *sanctum sanctorum*. Even before universal temple entry, however, participation of lower castes in temple festivals had begun to fall off, especially in villages where the upper castes—primarily Nayers—had lost, through excessive partition of joint-family property, their economic ascendancy and corresponding control.

It would nevertheless be difficult to find a village where very many examples of the interdependence of castes do not survive, not only in its economic but in its more ritual aspects. In spite of district—and Kerala-wide organizations of individual castes that have sprung up in recent years to reform internal custom along the lines of all-Indian Hinduism, and, perhaps, to obtain political representation, these practices continue. Convention is too strong to allow them to fall into disuse for many years to come. Many families are still bound together in their ancient master-servant relationship. In villages near towns, increasing numbers of people have abandoned traditional occupations for

labour in industry; but there are few instances of Hindus entering occupations proper to castes other than their own.

Despite population growth and movement every village retains a nucleus of families from all castes who have lived there from time immemorial. Immigrant families, even down to the fifth generation, are remembered as "foreigners", though they may have intermarried extensively with native families of their own sub-caste. Partly because of population movements, however, and more especially because of its lack of compactness, the Kerala village is probably a less self-contained entity than its counterparts elsewhere in India.

As Professor Srinivas points out, we must distinguish between the "vertical unity of many castes", which is the village, and the horizontal unity of individual castes, with affiliations over a wide area. One can picture a vast expanse of Neapolitan ice cream, with its layers of pink, green, white, and yellow, cut into individual portions—the villages—which contain a fair share of each colour.

In Kerala, at least, however, the structure is not quite so simple, as that. In a Cochin village, for example, the low caste of Velans may provide washerwomen to launder regularly for Iravas and to supply purificatory cloths (*māttu*) on special occasions for Nayars. In such a case half-a-dozen Velan families may do the Irava work while two more restrict themselves to serving Nayars. (It is this sort of distinction that could lead to the formation of separate sub-castes.) Alternatively, the family of such a caste may serve only a certain sector of the village. On the other hand, a family of the Kanisan (astrologer) caste might have less than enough work in its own village, A, and be the official astrologer family serving the adjoining village, B, as well. Basket-making families in B might serve villages A and C in addition to their own. The family of a small sub-caste that cuts hair and assist at funerals of the blacksmith and carpenter castes may well have a clientele in a dozen other villages.

Again, in Cochin, if two Nayars meet as strangers, the regular question asked is not "What village do you come from?", but "Whose Nayar are you?" This refers to a special link existing between every Nayar family (at least of the Sudra Nayar sub-caste) and a particular Nambudiri family, to which



it owes special services of a semi-ritual nature. Although Nambudiri families often take village names, a Sudra Nayar family may owe obligations to Nambudiris in quite a different village.

The "vertical" system of rights and obligations between castes is, therefore, not confined to the village. Indeed, this overlapping is probably one of the factors formerly contributing to the unity of the *nād* (chiefdom).

The horizontal layers of our Neapolitan ice—the castes—extend over wide areas, sharing a common culture; but previously only Nambudiris and Nayars had any form of organization deployed beyond the *nād*. Occasionally there was a conference of Nayars of a wider area (perhaps at a trial of strength between Nayars of two chiefdoms), but for the overwhelming majority of castes, the *nād* was the outside limit of any internal administration, which seldom extended so far. As already mentioned, internal organization of castes over wider regions is a modern phenomenon, and so also is conflict between castes within the village.

We see therefore that village unity in North Kerala is a somewhat nebulous conception. A physical, territorial unity may exist, but it is often not obvious, because of scattered settlement. Close neighbours may belong to different *deśams*, and the modern—often arbitrary—administrative divisions may mean that a cluster of families on the perimeter of one *deśam* have more social relations in the next *deśam* than in their own. Economic unity may be modified by the extension of caste obligations to several villages or their restriction to a segment of a single village. The *amśam*, the modern administrative unit, is sometimes co-extensive with a former *deśam*, and if the *deśavari* or *yajamānan* family remains powerful enough the unit may retain its former political and juridical cohesion. In such cases the blossoming of its modern constituent *deśams* into independent village communities has been inhibited; but more frequently the modern *deśam* has acquired a community life of its own, perhaps focussed on a "great family" and temple which were formerly subordinate to an external *deśavari*. The same considerations apply to the ritual unity of a village; the chief temple festival of the year may be at the *deśam*

temple, or it may occur at a temple shared by neighbouring *desams*.

Thus, although any sociological investigator in Kerala may provisionally take the modern *desam* as a suitable unit for study, he must examine the scale of social relations of all kinds over a broader area. Whatever internal self-subsistence there may have been in the *desams* of the eighteenth century and earlier, it is very difficult nowadays in Kerala to point to any unit as a clearly demarcated, coherent, independent village community.



W. H. Newell

## Goshen: A Gaddi Village in the Himalayas

IN INDIA there are multitudes of different customs, rites and ceremonies, some of which are found all over India, others of which are found only in one spot, which represent the individuality of the area concerned. The study of a district's individual peculiarities is every bit as important as the study of broad general features of the whole Indian society, in fact even more important. Just as in the history of physics major discoveries were made by experimentalists who refused to ascribe to experimental error small differences in their practical results from what their theory prescribed, so in comparative sociology small differences in custom may reveal a new sociological theory much more clearly than a lifelong poring over the Vedas. And yet it is just these impartial scientific studies of village communities as they actually work which is lacking in India.

The Gaddi people are an especially interesting people from this point of view. Entirely Hindu and 90 per cent illiterate, many of their *purohits* can recite large passages from the *Ramayana* by heart. They live in small villages scattered along the banks of the Upper Ravi and Budl Nadl rivers in Chamba State and along the foothills of the Dhaula Dhar range in the Palampur *tahsil* of the Kangra district of the Eastern Punjab. They wear a distinctive costume of handwoven woollen cloth like a Scottish kilt stretching from their necks to their knees with a woollen rope around their waists. In their hands is usually a *hookah* or a pipe, and tucked in their woollen rope a purse covered with bright red beads and a flint and pouch of tinder for making fire. They are probably the wealthiest of all the separate peoples who make up Chamba State, but this is not due to their skill in agriculture but to the fact that a number of villagers in every village supplement their income by tending sheep and goats. During the winter they care for their sheep in the Kangra Valley; in the spring they cross

over the range to Bharmaur and to the Tibetan-speaking district of Lahul; in the autumn they climb up to the high 12,000 feet pastures on the intervening range, gradually being forced down to the Kangra plain again for the winter. But in spite of the fact that they are so largely a pastoral people, by no means does every house in the village keep sheep, but every single shepherd on the mountain has a fixed home, which is often a very solid three-storied building made of stone and wood. During the winter large numbers of Gaddis who have no sheep move from the central district either to stay with relatives on the Kangra side or else to look for odd jobs on the Punjab plains taking gladly whatever their Hindu co-religionists will give them in the way of food. I would call the Gaddis a predominantly agricultural people with a subsidiary interest in sheep-grazing. Most families also have a few cows and bullocks, which are used for milk, or for drawing the plough during the summer. An average bullock sells for fifty rupees. These cannot cross over the ranges every season, and during the winter in every village there remain one or two villagers to look after them. There is a definite fixed rate of payment per animal per month and the villager remaining behind has to find fodder for the animals he is looking after.

The fields of the inhabitants of Bharmaur *tahsil* are heavily terraced on account of the steep slopes of the hillside. The houses in each village are grouped together. Where there is more than one caste in a village, sometimes the castes are separated into two villages, sometimes they all live in the same village. All villages have a village shrine and usually two or three springs within walking distance. Where there is no water sometimes a tank is dug. All castes use the same springs and water, but only the main caste may contribute food to the village shrine. Other castes usually have their own smaller shrine in another place. I am using the word "caste" as an endogamous, interdining group, and thus Rajput and Khatri, although two castes in the Punjab, are only one caste among the Gaddis as they intermarry and interdine. The size of the villages varies from one family of about a dozen people to over a hundred families of more than 600 people. The usual size is about 20 families. Each village also has a burning-ground



(*ghat*) near running water, but each clan (*gotra*) has its separate spot on public land where it burns its own dead.

The fields can be used to illustrate the Gaddi idea of property in land. In the first place each field belongs to a male member of a certain *gotra*. When he dies, it is inherited first by his son or grandson and then by his brothers by the same father. But in default of any sons or brothers it reverts back to his *gotra* among the members of whom the land is divided. In default of any *gotra* members being alive, it reverts to the *rajah*, whose property all land in the State really is. But strictly speaking it is only the right to use land which is inherited. This is shown by the fact that if a man adopts a person as son without the approval of the *gotra*, only half the land descends to the adopted heir. But until the recent incorporation of the State of Chamba within the Indian Union, the *rajah* could appropriate land without compensation. Strictly speaking, revenue was really rent for the land.

As I said previously, the land is steeply terraced. To be terraced, land requires quantities of stones. When a stone is lifted up from a piece of waste land and placed in a terrace, it becomes the property of the owner of the terrace. If a flood or snow avalanche displaces the stones on to the field below, it still remains his property. The owner of the lower field has a duty to remove the stones from his property and to place them in neat piles near the excavation, but not to replace them in the upper terrace, which is the duty of the owner of the upper terrace. The displaced earth, however, remains the property of the owner of the lower terrace. I merely cite these two examples to show that to the Gaddis there is practically no such thing as absolute ownership in property. There is also no such thing as communal ownership but only the right to use certain property for certain purposes. Even such common property as the village shrine has carefully apportioned rights in respect to it and duties towards it.

Bharmaur is the main *tahsil* in which the Gaddis live. Another name which the Gaddis give to the Bharmaur *tahsil* is Gadaren, land of the Gaddis, and it is Bharmaur which they consider as the centre of their community. A third name for this district is Shivabhumi, home of Shiva. These three names

illustrate the three attitudes which the Gaddi must take towards his homeland. He is first a citizen of the State of Chamba, which was ruled by a non-Gaddi *rajah*. This *rajah* formally appointed the *tahsildār*, controlled the usual government functions and (in former times) appointed an especial officer for smelling out witchcraft. The Gaddi is secondly a citizen of a distinctive community with a long history, and with distinct custom and traditions. He is, third, an inhabitant of an especially sacred part of India under the especial protection of Shiva and containing the famous Mani Mahesh lake to which thousands of pilgrims from lower India come every year. The Gaddi tries to reconcile all these attitudes even when they conflict.

But although the Gaddis are the predominant group in Bharmaur *tahsil*, there are other minor groups present who exercise an influence on the Bharmaur community. And here it is important to notice the dual meaning of the word "Gaddi". To the outsider, the term "Gaddi" means all those who call themselves Gaddis and who wear the distinctive Gaddi costume. But to the Gaddi himself, a Gaddi is that person of Hindu religion who is a Rajput or a Khatri or a Thakur by caste and who usually wears a Gaddi costume and who claims to be a Gaddi. This second definition excludes Brahmins (a very important community as they are necessary to perform all Sanskritic religious functions), Rathis, Sipis and Holeyas. Thus in Bharmaur there are really four main castes, if the mark of a caste is intermarriage and interdining. At the top are Brahmins; below them are Rajputs, Khatri and Thakurs; third are Sipis and Rathis, remnant of the original inhabitants of the district and owners of sufficient land for their needs; and at the bottom are Holeyas, basket-makers, shoe-makers, coolies and so on.

As a general rule, the villages consist almost entirely of one caste, all Sipis, all Rajputs or all Brahmins. There are no castes other than these and there is practically none of that occupational specialisation found in south Indian villages. The one exception to this rule is that only Brahmins can be *purohits*. All castes, other than Brahmins and even some of them, will eat meat freely and drink *sur*, a kind of mild beer.



There are no shoemakers (other than immigrant Holeyas from the plains), and most Gaddis buy shoes from Chamba. My host in the village in which I resided was a tailor. Before that he kept a small restaurant in Lahore, and before that again, had been a soldier in the army. At a wedding which I attended the priest was a Brahmin who kept a small shop in Bharmaur, tended his own fields, lent a little money on interest, and was *pujari* in the famous Bharmaur temple, a combination of occupational functions by no means exceptional. Rajput Gaddis play musical instruments at weddings.

But it would be quite a mistake to think of the caste-consciousness of the Gaddis as being in any way weakened by its non-occupational nature. The use to which it is put by the villagers has only changed. Caste is the means by which inter-village and intra-village marriage is regulated. Caste is that system which limits those who are one's kinsmen and to whom one can marry one's son or daughter. The caste is a large community, the relations between members of whom can be strengthened by marriage so as to forward economic, religious or friendship ties. It is marked by the members being able to sit around the same fire, smoke with the same pipe-stem and eat the same food. Formerly members of this community could be expelled by a village council for infringing caste rules, but within the last few generations these functions have fallen into disuse. The last case in which any of my villagers could remember a man being expelled from the caste was three generations ago when a man was expelled for living with a woman of lower caste. (His marriage was perfectly legal although of an inferior form. He still retained full rights in his *gotra* and family property. He only had to move his place of residence and to cease interdining.) The reason why there are so few infringements against caste rules is due not to a lowering of caste-consciousness, but to a number of material and economic factors :

(a) I should estimate about 90 per cent of the people in the valley are either Rajputs or Brahmins, and since most castes live in separate villages, there is very little intimate contact between different castes as has been described for the Mysore village of Rampura. Moreover, the lower castes of Rathis and

Sipis hold as much land in proportion to their numbers as the higher castes. The Holeyas who are the bottom caste and who constitute one per cent of the total population, are not necessary to the working of the system. They live in separate villages and have no reason to enter Brahmin or Rajput villages to perform essential duties. The higher castes only visit the Holeyas to obtain labour for hire, or for the performance of *birton*—agreements. (Ceremonial gift or labour exchange. In the United Provinces this is termed the *jājmāni* system.)

(b) The severe pressure on land due to an increase in population affects all castes equally, not only the poor. Owing to the fact that there was formerly only one landlord, the *rajah*, no one could own land in the sense in which absolute ownership in land was possible in British India. In this respect the introduction of the idea of absolute ownership in land as is being done under the present government may well lead to a rise in a landlord class unless it is carefully watched.

(c) Economic and social development has hardly touched this part of Himachal Pradesh.

(d) It is usually the lower castes in other parts of India who refuse to perform their *birton* and ritual functions thus undermining the caste system. But in this part of Chamba there is no ceremony in which Sipis or Holeyas are necessary. They are really outside the system and are too few in numbers to force their way in. Rajputs will quite freely play musical instruments at weddings and other functions. In fact they very often do it considerably better than the trained musicians.

To illustrate the collective status of the caste members, I shall give an example from my own experience. As the first European who had ever lived in a Gaddi village and as a member of (until recently) the dominant white government group, the question was what was to be done with me when I attended a wedding feast. Being an outcaste or rather a non-caste, I could not sit around the fire with the Rajputs. As it was cold, I gravitated towards the musicians' (Holeyas') fire. They welcomed me effusively. But after the first day, I always found a separate fire lit for me half way between the Holeyas and the Rajputs. Those who wished to speak to me from either camp could come and sit at my fire, but I could not sit



at theirs except by performing some fiction such as sitting with my back to the fire as though I were not present. As my host said to me, "You are not a Rajput, but you are obviously very much higher than a Holeya". So a new temporary caste of Newell was formed. Presumably if I had acquired some land by government grant and had taken a Rajput wife by the marriage form not requiring a priest, then I and my descendants would have become a new caste. In my opinion some such process occurred in the first place to populate these valleys. Originally there were Tibetan inhabitants as one inscription below Goshen village shows. These disappeared for some reason and became incorporated into or replaced by Sipis. Then followed an invasion of warlike Rajputs from Delhi or Lahore who conquered the Sipis, Hinduised them and built the temples at Bharmaur. As they were few in numbers they did not take all the Sipis' land. Then, finding that they could not get married without Brahmins, they gave part of their waste land to Brahmins who came here from elsewhere. (Even now all the Brahmins occupy the worst land on the higher slopes of the valley.) A theocratic government was set up under a number of *rishis* in Bharmaur. Finally this was replaced by a Gaddi *rajah* who, as he became stronger, conquered those in the lower reaches of the river and moved his capital from Bharmaur to Chamba. From that day on the social structure of Bharmaur has remained very much the same with a gradual influx of immigrants from the plains at the time of Aurangzeb as a result of Muslim persecution. Certain characteristics of the present society go to confirm this thesis.

From the point of view of absence of violent change within the last 300 years, undoubtedly the most important factor has been that the people have been satisfied with things as they are and have been for the most part unaffected by the numerous invasions by hostile forces elsewhere. The main Tibet road passes through Lahul, not through the Upper Ravi valley. The main Kashmir-India route passes through Jammu. In contrast with Jammu which was founded only 250 years ago and has had a very broken history of invasions, there is a continuous Bharmauri history of at least 2,000 years with comparatively few invasions from outside.

It is reasonable to assume that when the Rajputs first conquered the Sipis, they must have been warlike in order to dispossess the owners of the country. But during the intervening period the character of the Gaddis seems to have gradually changed. The villages are not surrounded by any sort of wall and no memory of such a wall exists; some agricultural land of Chobia is found in the middle of Goshen village by a sort of historical accident; but "accident" has been so for fifty years without any attempt by the Goshen village to dispossess the Chobia owners. Even when bad feelings develop between two families as a result of a bad marriage or a failure to carry out a contract, the feeling seems to gradually disappear within a generation and does not result in a more or less permanent state of feud between two families or two villages. Some of the reasons for this state of affairs I have already given, an adequate supply of land up to the present, the general arrangement of one caste to one village with a majority of Rajputs, and the lack of any opportunity for different groups to have serious conflicting interests. Another reason and perhaps the most important, is that when the area of land one farms, becomes too small for subsistence, there are always opportunities to take up sheep-rearing. Baden-Powell in his "Land systems of British India" showed that the continuous existence of the caste system depended in great part on there being adequate supplies of arable land available to cover any increase in population. Although Gaddi land is limited, overpopulation is solved by the members of land-hungry families looking after the grazing of sheep. At the moment there is still plenty of land available for grazing, and a good price for wool.

Another important factor making for Gaddi good-naturedness and the absence of serious quarrels is the dislike of physical violence. Within the elementary family no physical violence is allowed. When a child is small it is given complete freedom to do as it likes. If by chance it should infringe some household rule, the child will under no conditions be beaten. If it should burst into tears under some rebuke, other members of the family will take its part and make peace between the child and its parents. A crying infant will never be stopped by hitting it. Two Gaddis who have drunk too much *sur* at a religious



feast and start to argue with each other will immediately be separated by bystanders and taken away. Even the smallest sight of blood will cause a Gaddi to feel ill. On one occasion a villager cut his foot while digging in the ground, and although the wound was very slight, on returning home his two daughters and nephew started to weep bitterly so that they could be heard miles away. This continued even after the wound had been bound up. This is not to say that Gaddis do not quarrel and do not on occasion commit murders under violent emotion, but there are no organized scenes of violence. There are no instances of villages fighting each other. In some respects one could call the Gaddis the ideal followers of Gandhi (albeit unconsciously)—little quarrelling, home-spun clothes and not a very great dependence on manufactured goods. The ideal Gaddi is a man with adequate land, sufficient flock, a good house, a pleasant wife, numerous children, male and female, a man generous in his gifts to all his friends, and with enough *sur* and food to give frequent feasts. A man such as this is the pride of every household.

In spite of the fact that nearly every village consists of only one caste, caste-consciousness is much stronger than village-consciousness. This is because a village really consists of four or five *gotras* who live in the same area. The *gotras* are really the basic unit of village government. But under the rule of exogamy it is not possible to find a wife within one's own *gotra*. The result is that there are multitudes of inter-village affinal links which tie the various villages together. In the village in which I resided, there were some marriages which took place within the village, some with the next village, some five miles away and some as far away as Palampur across the ranges. If one were to draw a map showing the distribution of those women from the village who married outside, it would be like a concentric circle with the greatest number of marriages near the village gradually becoming fewer the further from home. Since one is always likely to have the greatest quarrels and disagreements with those nearest to one, the practical effect is that, should a dispute take place, there are always relatives who have social and economic reasons for settling the dispute as quickly as possible. If a dispute could not be settled

in this way, an informal tribunal would be set up with members not concerned with the dispute and approved of by both sides. But such a dispute would never be a dispute between two villages but between two groups of people, possibly in different villages.

Villages themselves are not very important entities. Most of the larger groups of villages have a *lambardār*, who is usually also the biggest payer of land revenue, and who collects the revenue on behalf of the *rajah* and now on behalf of the State. Above him there is the *likhnāra* who resides at Bharmaur and who is appointed by the government. Above him is a *tahsildār* who is directly responsible to the Deputy Commissioner. Only the last two receive a full-time government salary. The *lambardār* in the village in which I resided could neither read nor write, but because his village is such a small unit, he can easily remember how much land each person has. But actually these officials have very little to do with village government. The older men of the village discuss such things as the upkeep of certain roads which are not the responsibility of the Public Works Department, or any government demand for coolies. (There was formerly a special official responsible for providing free coolies for government duties, but this office is now abolished and coolies are employed for hire.) The smallness of the village unit precludes the necessity of a formalised village government. But in the event of a really serious dispute there is nothing between the local unit and the Chamba law courts. Within the last year the new Indian government has appointed a new official to assist the *likhnāra*, the *patwāri*, whose job it is to keep the land records.

This undeveloped system of village administration is to some extent due to the attitude of the *Rajah* of Chamba towards his subjects. The whole area of Chamba State was the personal property of the *rajah* but he could allow certain people to cultivate his land on payment of revenue. This right was only dependent on his pleasure. Similarly all grazing rights in the hills were sub-let to middlemen who collected grazing fees on behalf of the *rajah* from those Gaddis using the land for sheep and goats. This system prevented the rise of any group other than tenant cultivators. Because all subjects were equal before



the *rajah*, any one could appeal directly to him over the heads of officials.

Some remarks should be made here about the system of *birton*, the system of traditionally-sanctioned mutual obligation and duties between individuals usually belonging to different castes. This was especially noticeable during the marriage of a son or daughter in the *saj* and *tambol* ceremonies. At the marriage of a son or daughter those people who have *birton* with the bride or bridegroom's father present gifts of money to the father to help defray the cost of the wedding. These gifts have no relationship to either caste or kinship. The amount of money given is written down and at the donor's wedding a similar gift is returned usually with a slight increase. Similarly a person who wishes to build a house may go to a group of Sipis with whom one has a *birton* agreement, and ask it to carry up slates for the house from the river 1,000 feet below. Payment may or may not be made, but if made it is below the market price of labour. The group will often receive a certain amount of the harvest if they are present while it is being threshed. This is not an economic bargain however, but a validation of an already existing social relationship. Another important *birton* relationship is that between a *purohit* and his clients. The Gaddis were very careful to explain to me that they could terminate these relationships any time that they wished, but after many enquiries, I was unable to find any one who had ever done so. It is the *birton* system which holds different individuals and groups together in different castes and villages. It was noticeable that in the four or five weddings that I attended, the majority of *birton* gifts at *tambol* came from people with whom normally one had little contact.

Thus the three main groups of ties are as follows: Marriage joins together people of the same caste but different *gotras*. Kin joins together people of the same *gotra*. *Birton* joins people of different castes and *gotras* together. The strength and social validation of these three institutions differ considerably. This is associated with an absence of marked inequalities.

The Gaddis can be seen as a large community of people covering a mountainous area of about 200 square miles and held together by a common dress, common dialect and

common custom. Owing to their strong feeling of solidarity with each other and the nature of the village organization in which they live, there is very little formalised village government. The absence of friction between villages and individuals is heightened by their unwillingness to use force and inflict pain only for the sake of putting forward their point of view. One of the most important forces making for this sense of unity and solidarity among all the Gaddis is their strong feeling of caste brotherhood and, to them, caste is a more important unifying force even than common residence in the same village.



G. Morris Carstairs

## Bhil Villages of Western Udaipur: A Study in Resistance to Social Change

IN THE proud history of Mewar (the "Vir-Bhumi" of Hindustan) the Bhil tribesmen have played an important part. It was a Bhil who brought up Bappa Rawal, a forefather of the Maharanas of Udaipur; and for centuries Bhil armies fought with their Rajput rulers against a succession of invaders. Thus it is that the Bhils though themselves illiterate and lacking even a tradition of popular ballad-history, such as the minstrel *charans* and *bhats* provide for their near neighbours, are yet commemorated in the writings and verse of the Rajputs; and their long association is symbolised in the Mewar royal crest which shows a sun in splendour, with on one side a Rajput, on the other a Bhil warrior. It is therefore all the more striking that in spite of centuries of such contact, the Bhils have maintained their quite separate and distinctive social structure and mode of life.

In the minds of its inhabitants, the former State of Udaipur was considered to consist of three main parts: the plains of the north and east, known as *Mewar*; the foot-hills called *Magra*, and the highlands of the south and west, the *Bhomat*. Of these, the first two divisions were decisively mastered by the Rajputs. There Bhils are in a minority; many of the farmers being of Gujar, Dhangī, Rebarī and other Hindu castes within the larger village groups of Rajputs, Brahmins and Banias as well.

The *Bhomat*, however, presents a completely different picture. There the Bhils were never conquered; even the *Jāgirdārs* are of Bhil ancestry. Some can show *pattas* granted them by Rana Partab for services rendered to him in his life-long struggle against the Moghuls. In the valleys among these jungle-covered hills, the population consists almost entirely of Bhils.

Villages in this Bhil country are quite unlike those of the plains. Bhil houses are built at some distance from each other. Sometimes a man's married sons will build their homes close

to their father's but most houses are alone, built strategically on the top of a small hill, or on a jungle slope so as to command a view over the paths of approach. To a stranger these houses seem to be scattered at random all over the countryside; but stop and speak to any Bhil and he will be able to say to which village his house belongs, and who is his *Mukhi* or headman. Village names are very numerous, and refer sometimes to a group of only four or five huts in a tributary valley, but a *Mukhi* always belongs to a larger group, of a dozen or more households; and in some cases several smaller hamlets come under his jurisdiction. Thus Malia belongs to Mithi-bor, a hamlet of five houses, which is an offshoot of Bodi village. If he is involved in any dispute, he may consult old Ladu, the *Mukhi* of Bodi; but if it is a really serious matter, they will both resort to Kuma, the *Mukhi* of Tep, whose authority is acknowledged by all three villages.

This post of *Mukhi* is hereditary with the provision that the most capable and not necessarily the eldest, son of the previous headman is accepted by the villagers as his successor. The *Mukhi* represents the village in all dealings with other villages or with the Ruler's representatives. His authority is unchallenged—provided that it is sensibly exercised; because all the time there is an accompaniment of discussion of each village event among the senior heads of houses and only if the *Mukhi's* decisions are endorsed with their approval does he command his villagers' obedience. The Bhils here are organized in exogamous patrilineal lineages, akin to the *gotra* of caste Hindus. When referring to one another by name, they quote the lineage as a surname; thus the three men whose names we have mentioned above are known as Malia Bhumaria, Ladu Kheir and Kuma Dhangi respectively. If further identification is necessary, they add "of such and such a village". The usual Hindu practice of quoting a man's name and then his father's is new to them, although they are rapidly becoming familiarised with it on ration cards and this year on the voter's roll.

Each village has a nucleus of households of the same lineage as its *Mukhi* who is traditionally descended from the first settlers in that area. But in almost every case other lineages are also represented. In about ten per cent of marriages the



couple finally settle in the bride's village. Most villages also have one or two families who have settled in the course of the last few years, either bringing their cattle to new grazing, or staying to clear a strip of jungle and plant crops. Such incomers are generally related more or less distantly to some members of the village; but strangers may also come, and having obtained the *Mukhi's* consent, built their home in the outskirts of the village area.

As may be inferred from the above, there is no serious congestion in this territory. Every one raises *makai* (maize) in the rainy season—as much as he can tend—and still a good deal of arable land in the smaller valleys is left to run wild. In winter, the hill streams usually do not dry up and their waters are led by ingeniously constructed series of earth and wooden channels, called *saran*, to irrigate fields of wheat and gram. In consequence, most of the fields lie idle until the next rains.

The jungle provides good grazing all the year round and every family has a modicum of cattle and goats, whose milk they turn to *ghee* and sell at the nearest trader's shop. This, and the sale of bee's wax found in the jungle, and leaves for the wrapping of *bidis*, provides them with a few annas a day just enough to buy the essentials of life—salt, pepper, grain and tobacco. Their diet rarely includes any vegetables; occasionally it is relieved with small game, which they hunt with bows and arrows. Their idea of luxury is a feed of *gur* and a drink of *dāru*, the spirit locally distilled from *mohwa* flowers.

To a newcomer, a striking feature about these northern Bhils is that they all go about armed, carrying bows and arrows, or muskets or swords—and invariably a sharp dagger in a sheath at their waists. When they see a stranger walking in their hills, they stand with weapons at the ready, looking to see who he is; and this wariness is not misplaced, because robbery and violence are of common occurrence. At night they sleep huddled round a log fire, on the earth floor of their flimsy leaf and bamboo huts, and they sleep with one eye open, ready to rush to the attack if a raider tries to steal one of their cattle in the dark. When this happens, they cry "thief", and some one runs to beat the drum which is kept in every *Mukhi's*

house. This brings out all the men of the village armed and ready for a fight. If the thief is caught, he is given a very thorough beating and then let go.

In an idle and hungry time, like the present year of drought, robbery is especially rife. Thieves who get away with a valuable prize, such as a cow or a bullock, will try to drive it to a distant part of *Bhomat*, or southwards into Gujrat, and there sell it; but if the chase is too hot, they hide, and slaughter the cattle, and have a feast. They do not share the Hindu's abhorrence of eating beef.

If they rob each other, they are still more prone to rob strangers passing through their countryside. Wayfarers are set upon, beaten and robbed of all they have, down to the last shred of their clothing. For this reason, travellers find it necessary to move in parties, carrying guns, or else to employ Bhils to give them *agwa*, that is, to provide an armed escort to protect them from the others.

When grazing is scarce in the plains of Mewar and Marwar and Sirohi, numbers of Rebari herdsmen come to these jungles with herds of sheep, goats, cattle and camels—and they are regarded as fair game. The Rebaris are told by the villagers in whose area they have camped, that they must sacrifice a young buffalo to the village goddess, then they can rely on the Bhils' support in case of theft. They do so, and the villagers have a feast—but still in spite of their vigilance (and here the Rebaris also carry weapons all the time) they suffer a constant toll of beasts stolen in the jungle.

Besides pre-occupation with theft, the Bhils devote a good deal of time and energy to the pursuit of love and to the feuds that break out whenever a husband discovers that he has been cuckolded. In a group of five villages it was found that 15 per cent of all marriages were cases in which the bride had been abducted, usually with her own connivance. They call this "*zai baraw*" or "*gis len ayo*" or "*tani layo*"—and always they smile with relish in recalling this gallant sport. Such an abduction causes a state of hostility to break out between the villages concerned, especially if there is an aggrieved husband in the case. "My nose has been cut off," he says, and his kinsmen often help him to avenge the insult by attacking the



offender's village. In such a feud, it is not necessarily the abductor himself who is the target of attack, but the most eminent man in this village: he may be shot at or waylaid and beaten.

Later on, when tempers have cooled a little (and preferably before blood has been shed) the *Mukhi* of the offender's village begins to negotiate a peaceful settlement. This is done through the girl's family; if she were married before, the wronged husband must be paid a considerable fine (Rs. 100 to 300), usually in the form of calves and young bullocks. If the girl were unmarried, a much more modest sum (Rs. 15 to 30) is given to her father as *dhapa* or bride price.

It has been mentioned that the Rajahs of this Bhil country are themselves reputed to be of Bhil descent; but they themselves are more anxious to assert their superiority than their kinship. In fact they are all self-styled "Chauhan" or "Solanki" Rajputs now; and, like other recent converts, they have tended to exaggerate the characteristics of their new allegiance, so that as Rajahs they were fierce and even more despotic than their Rajput models. It might be argued (and it was) that so lawless a tenantry must be kept down with great severity; but the brutality of their soldiery, and their practice of demanding forced labour and free maintenance for their servants when they travelled abroad, did little to endear them to the Bhils. Indeed the Rajahs would have been unable to remain masters of their own lands if it had not been for the authority of the Mewar Bhil Corps, which since its formation in 1840, provided a background of semi-martial law throughout the *Bhomat*. It was thanks to the influence of this Corps that the Bhil country first began to be opened up by motorable roads, and that trading with the outer world commenced.

Politics in the modern sense reached this Bhil country just after the First World War when a Congress pioneer, called Moti Lal Tejawat, began to tour the hill tracts, preaching the need for reform. In part, his teaching was like that of the *bhagats* who appear from time to time among the Bhils, and command a sporadic allegiance. Like them, he said: "Stop eating meat, stop drinking *dāru*". But he went on to say: "Stop robbing Banias"—he came himself from a Bania

family, with shops in certain *Bhomat* villages. Moti Lal enjoyed a sudden fame, and was even worshipped as a god, being carried from village to village seated upon a *chārpoī*, while Bhils approached to clasp his feet and offer him the homage of a coconut and a rupee.

The reason for his popularity lay not in his familiar prohibitions but in a new teaching which he propounded: "This land is yours, the Bhils'. You should be the masters here yourselves, and not obey the tyrant Rajahs, nor pay taxes to the Government." This was a dangerous doctrine to preach to a warlike populace. On the positive side, Moti Lal and other Congress pioneers did succeed in first modifying and then abolishing the exactions of forced labour and tribute in kind; but he was also responsible for exciting a spirit of anarchy and revolt. The height of his influence was reached in 1922, when an army of Bhils was confronted by a detachment of the Mewar Bhil Corps near the village of Nal. Moti Lal told his followers that he would speak a *mantar* which would turn the soldiers' bullets to water; and when they fired a warning volley in the air, the Bhils believed his *mantar* was taking effect, and they attacked boldly; but the next volleys killed many of them, and the rest fled, among them Moti Lal. He has never since been able to recapture that first entire devotion.

During the recent elections, in which he stood as Independent, having fallen out with Congress, the writer heard him explain to two bewildered Bhil constituents that this was just one of many Sahibs who constantly came to visit him and he went on to bewilder them still more with tales of London where the streets are of solid silver, and of Paris, where houses are built of gold and studded with jewels. He did not win the seat.

In the daily life of these Bhils, magic and witchcraft play a very important part while religion occupies a minor role. It is true that they sometimes invoke Bhagwan, whom they regard as being above all other gods, but seldom intervening in the lives of ordinary mortals; and they have a smattering of knowledge of some of the Hindu deities. Indeed, every large village has its separate *devra*, a small roofless stone hut, in which are placed a row of images—of Dharm Rāj, Kāla-Nāg, Bhairav



and one or other Mātāji. These images are of baked clay, and brightly painted. They are made in the village of Molera, near Nathdwara, and it costs the Bhils a six-day journey on foot to bring them. They refer to them as "those Mewar gods". Once brought, however, these handsome images are neglected, left out in all weathers, so that in most *devras* they lie colourless and badly worn. On one night in the year, there is a *jagaran* at this shrine, but for the rest of the year no one bothers to visit it. Whereas in Mewar, the *bhopa*, or priest of the shrine, is a very important person, here, among the Bhils he is regarded as a figure of fun, and is little respected. They turn instead to the *devalo*, or village magician, to diagnose all cases of sickness, and to effect his magical remedies. If the *devalo* is esteemed highly, it is partly because of the universal belief in witchcraft. Not only is every adult woman believed to practise this; in addition, every head of a household keeps a *Sikotri*, that is, a demon-goddess with her attendant executive agent, the *Vir*. If appealed to with appropriate *mantars*, this *Sikotri* will send her *Vir* to strike down your enemy and when this happens, only the skill of a very clever *devalo* can save his life. So prevalent is this magic, that in making a betrothal, the negotiators commonly ask: "Is there a Protector in the house?" meaning, does the household possess a *Sikotri*, and only if the answer is "Yes", do they proceed.

Some households, instead of *Sikotri*, keep a shrine sacred to *Kamria-path*, a fierce and jealous male god, who demands a lot of homage in the form of singing and dancing to strange, exciting, traditional Bhil tunes; in turn, he frequently enters into and "possesses" the worshippers as a sign of his goodwill—and he is heartily feared by all who do not adhere to this sect.

Put briefly, then, the Bhils show a dim awareness of some aspects of Hindu worship, but their own old gods and demons still command much greater fear and respect. A similar pattern of lip service to the new and real adherence to the old ways can be seen in their mode of settling disputes.

For as long as the Bhils can remember, they have lived under two different, sometimes contradictory systems, of social discipline—their own tribal custom, and the exactions of the

“ Raj ”; by which term they denote all alien authority, whether that of the Rajahs and their soldiery or the British-officered Mewar Bhil Corps, or the new civilian administration of Tehsildar and Magistrate, and Forest and Revenue Officers, backed by the armed police. This Raj is always there in the background; and at times it is deliberately invoked. For example, in cases of murder or serious theft, it is becoming a recognised form of retaliation to file a complaint and so bring upon the offender's village the scourge of a rustic police investigation, but that is really irrelevant to the serious process of settling the dispute.

So long as a feud exists—and in every village there are always two or three “ ubo ”, i.e., outstanding—the parties to it “ break off diplomatic relations ”, that is, they will not sit nor eat nor smoke together and, again like sovereign powers, they “ reserve the right to take appropriate action ” with bow and arrow or sword or muzzle-loader. It is this continuing threat of the recourse to violence which stimulates the *Mukhis* and the neighbours of the families concerned, to work for a settlement; and until this has been reached, in the presence of a *panchāyat* of responsible caste fellows, and the disputants have eaten opium together to symbolise the end of their enmity, the dispute will not be over—no matter what the official decision has been.

An illustration of this process occurred last year. In the large village of Mandwa, some hundreds of Bhils were assembled to drink and perform the *gher* dance, after Holi. Suddenly a fight broke out between the relatives of two parties to a feud, and before it was over, two men of Mandwa and two of Kukawas were killed. The dancers hurriedly dispersed, and the dead were cremated in their respective villages, a crude monument being erected and a goat sacrificed to each one, as is the custom after a violent death. Next day, the police came and carried off a score of villagers to face the magistrates in Udaipur. They were collectively fined and released in due course; and three days later, the *Mukhis* and the elders of each village met together by the village of Ger and came to terms. Mandwa being more at fault, they had to pay over two bullocks and five cows to Kukawas. This done, they all ate opium and the villages were again at peace.



In an article in *The Economic Weekly* (January 26, 1952) the writer has discussed a Mewar village which was experiencing a rapid dissolution of many of its former social institutions. This was nowhere more apparent than in the collapse of the social sanctions formerly applied by the various caste *pañchāyats*. "Nowadays", the old men complained, "no one cares any longer about caste rules; if there is a dispute they run at once to the courts and start cases that go on for years profiting no one but the Vakils." The practice in the *Bhomat* is in strong contrast to this for, there, the great majority of minor disputes are still settled in the old way, by the village *Mukhis* concerned.

This conservation of custom is one aspect of a more general process which has kept the Bhils apart from all the other communities in Mewar. On the debit side, it has caused them to remain poor, unlettered and unskilled, although living on the richest soil in the country; to its credit must be put the robust traditions of song and dance, of independence and of exuberant *joie-de-vivre*, of which one would not wish them ever to be deprived.



Colin Rosser

## A "Hermit" Village in Kulu

ABOUT sixty miles north of Simla, as the crow flies, is the Himalayan district of Kulu, an area of some two thousand square miles of rugged, forest-clad mountains intersected by deep river valleys along which the villages are scattered. The mountain ranges are formidable barriers surrounding each valley. It is not therefore surprising to find, as one travels through Kulu, certain variations in dialect and custom, or to note that the villagers of one valley feel a sense of unity and difference when they compare themselves with the people living on the other side of the mountain. But these differences are slight and in Kulu generally the underlying uniformities of social life are such that no villager need feel uncomfortable or out of place, should he visit one of the villages in the neighbouring valleys. He may feel a stranger but not an alien. These remarks do not apply to the village of Malana which, though located administratively in Kulu *tahsil*, is unique in Kulu.

The remote village of Malana is well-known throughout Kulu as the home of "a different kind of people". The village with nearly 500 inhabitants, is perched on a sort of narrow shelf high on one side of a wild and isolated glen running roughly parallel to the Beas valley (the main river valley of Kulu) but separated from it by a chain of sharp-crested ridges. The altitude of Malana is 8,640 feet. Through the glen runs the boulder-strewn Malana torrent which has its source on Deo Tibba, the 20,000 feet snowy peak dominating the glen from the north. Below the village, the torrent enters a narrow gorge through which it thunders for about eight miles before it meets the Parbatti river, the main tributary of the Beas.

Malana, which is the only village in this glen, is extremely inaccessible—particularly during the winter months when heavy snow covers the 12,000 feet Chandrakanni Pass on the range separating Malana from the Beas valley, and also the



10,000 feet Rashol Pass opposite the village giving access to the Parbatti valley. During these months, the only route to Malana lies along the bank of the torrent itself—a perilous goat-track winding through the narrow gorge and below immense precipices. Falls of rock and huge boulders from the cliffs above are not infrequent, and tend to discourage visitors to the village. The whole eight miles or so from the Parbatti valley are in the nature of a long and difficult rock climb. In summer, the easiest route lies over the Chandrakanni Pass, though this involves a lengthy climb from Naggar in the Beas valley and an arduous descent of 4,000 feet from the Pass down the precipitous slope to the village. Loaded pack ponies cannot reach Malana by any of the paths, which are passable only to travellers on foot. The nearest village to Malana is about six hours hard journey away, by the track through the gorge.

I stress this severe physical isolation of Malana because it is of great importance when considering the social organization of the Malanis, and it is indeed the first striking impression that a visitor has on reaching the village—that of a small, compact community standing alone in a tangle of mountains, hemmed in and cut off from the outside world by these very clearly-defined barriers. One result of this isolation has been that Malana has been more or less ignored by the Government and is rarely visited by Government officials from Kulu. It enjoys a sort of *de facto* independence, and is indeed often jocularly referred to by educated Kulu men as “Malana Free State”. It has its own system of village government, its own court for settling disputes, and a measure of village autonomy quite distinct from that of other Kulu villages which have all been drawn into the official administrative system of Government departments and courts in the town of Kulu, and Government *panchāyats* and minor officials in each *Kothi* (or circuit of villages). Malana stands alone: independent, autonomous, “different” in the eyes of Kulu people, and certainly in the Malanis’ own estimation.

The Malanis have their own language, Kanashi, which must be one of the smallest languages in the world. This differs basically from the dialect of Pahari spoken generally in Kulu. Kanashi has its own grammar, syntax and vocabulary, and is

not understood by any Kulu villager other than the Malanis. The Malanis also speak Kuluhi—the Kulu dialect—and use this in their dealings with non-Malanis. Only Kanashi is spoken at Malana. No one in the village can read or write and, Kanashi is as yet unrecorded. This linguistic isolation of the Malanis can hardly be overemphasised since it is undoubtedly one of the most important features of the community. It automatically marks all non-Malanis as alien, and seems the prime factor in that “sense of belonging” which is so strong at Malana.

The Malani houses are of the usual Kulu pattern—large, two-storied and substantial, heavily-timbered with massive beams cut from the neighbouring forests. The family lives in the upper storey, while the lower is used as a byre for cattle, sheep and goats, and for the storage of the harvest of food-grains. The village is territorially divided into two compact areas of habitation about fifty yards apart, known respectively as Dhara Behr and Sara Behr. Between the two *behrs* is a neutral area known as the *harchar* (meeting-place). Here are located a large stone platform and a grass quadrangle round which are built three “rest-houses” for visitors to the village (and also used for cooking at certain ceremonies and for village assemblies in the winter months when the village is covered with heavy snow). This central area is of the utmost importance since it is the territorial hub of the village upon which turns the whole political and judicial organization.

When asked how many castes there are in the village, the Malanis invariably reply that there are two—Kanets (yeomen) and Lohars (smiths). But the Kanets so outnumber the low-caste Lohars (the actual ratio as given by the Malanis is 116 families of Kanets to 3 families of Lohars) that to all intents and purposes Malana is a one-caste village. Moreover, to the Malani Kanet, his village is in the nature of an entire caste; that is, though the Malanis are Kanets allegedly of the same caste as the majority of Kulu villagers, they act when visiting other villages as if they belonged to a caste apart from all others. The Kanets of the village scrupulously avoid physical contact with the Lohars who live apart from the main village in an area below Sara Behr. Socially, psychologically, and



physically, the Lohars are "outsiders"—though nonetheless indispensable from the economic and ritual points of view. The low-caste Lohar is completely dominated politically and almost entirely ignored socially.

The all-important Kanet section of the village is organized into eight patrilineal clans which are the exogamous units for marriage. Though certain of these clans claim that they were originally of higher caste than Kanet, they all now eat, smoke and marry together without restriction. Three of the clans have hereditary rights to the three key offices in the society, and are accorded special respect for this reason. But apart from this, all the clans intermingle quite freely and consider themselves equal.

In theory, if not quite in practice, Malana is an endogamous village. Occasionally Malani men take wives from the high village of Rashol which lies just outside the Malana glen, but they do not allow the Rashol men to take wives from Malana in return. The Malanis themselves certainly like to think of their village as endogamous, and marriage within the village is the preferred pattern. The Malanis say that the men of Dhara Behr should marry in Sara Behr and *vice versa*. In practice, this dual division is not strictly adhered to, and there are many cases of marriage having occurred between clans living in the same *behr*. This village endogamy is an important feature in the social isolation of the village. Malana is not only physically and linguistically isolated; it is socially insulated from outside contact.

Perhaps the most interesting feature of the village is its political and judicial organization. Throughout Kulu, Malana is famed both for its village council and as the "village of Jamlu". Jamlu, the powerful tutelary deity of Malana, dominates and pervades the whole village. In his worship, the unity and solidarity of the village are strikingly and elaborately expressed. Jamlu is the ultimate authority, and the source of power, in the political, judicial, and religious spheres. In this sense, the god becomes something far more than a mere malevolent being whom it is as well to propitiate. To an important extent, Jamlu can be regarded as the deification of the village, and as the apotheosis of the villagers. His power and influence

form an integral part of social control generally and of the political and judicial machinery in particular.

The power of government at Malana coincides with both the religious and juridical authority and resides in a group of eleven officials which is the village council. The basis of the council's authority emanates from the deity who is believed by the Malanis to have delegated his presiding authority to this body to manage the village in his name. The council is composed of three permanent members holding hereditary office, and eight *jestas* (elders) who are elected according to democratic principles.

The three permanent members are collectively known as the *mundie* (leaders). It is difficult to say whether or not these can be placed in an order of seniority. The Malanis have a strong sense of individual equality and when asked about the relative importance of officials tend to answer that all are equal and that no special official is superior to any other. This egalitarian feeling is an important sociological fact, and is demonstrated over and over again in behaviour. Yet my own observations tend to suggest that these "leaders" can be placed in the following hierarchical order—the Karmisht (god's manager), the *Pujara* (priest), and the *Gur* ("mouthpiece" of the god).

The present *Karmisht* is a pleasant young man, aged about 22, who assumed office a year ago on the death of his father. His main duties are the management of the lands owned by Jamlu, and all affairs connected with the god's treasury. He is responsible to the council for all the accounts (which, being illiterate, he keeps in his head with remarkable facility). He is not recognised as the chairman of the council but seems to act in this capacity. The *Pujara* and *Gur* are powerful figures in the society due largely to the fact that they possess a virtual monopoly in interpreting "the will of Jamlu"—a vital consideration to all Malanis, particularly when a dispute of any kind has arisen. The *Gur* at certain ceremonies goes into a state of possession in which he becomes the vehicle of communication between the god and the villager. Shaking and trembling violently, with his uncut black hair swinging out as he shakes his head sharply from side to side to the sound of frenzied drumming by the band, he indeed looks a wild figure. In this



state, he jerks out "with the voice of Jamlu" answers to questions put to him by devotees, directions about ceremonies, disputes, or problems troubling the village, and general harangues about the benefits of staunch belief, the necessity of following ancestral custom, and perhaps threats of what ill is likely to befall individuals or the village as a whole if the orders of the god are not obeyed.

When we come to consider the eight *jestas*, who with these "leaders" make up the village council, the hereditary principle gives way to a well-developed form of democratic election based on a form of grouping known as the *chug*. The eight clans are politically divided between the two *behrs*, four belonging to Dhara Behr and four to Sara Behr. Within each *behr*, the clans are grouped in pairs and each pair is called a *chug*. Thus there are two *chugs* in each of the territorial divisions of the village. Each *chug* elects two representatives to serve on the village council. These eight individuals make up the *jesta* section of the council.

All meetings (except when there is heavy snow) are held on the large stone platform in the centre of the village. The council members gather and sit in a group. The *Karmisht* tells any villager who happens to be at hand to call the public to attend. This man takes up a small piece of stick and, from a point near the platform, shouts loudly at intervals for about twenty minutes, all the time twirling the stick rapidly in his hand. After the last shout, he places the stick on the platform before the council, thus signifying the closing of the attendance roll. By this time all the adult males present in the village are required to assemble on the patch of ground before the platform. The eight elders survey the assembly to see who is absent from their respective *chugs*. If any one is absent, a messenger will be sent to his house to call him. If he has wilfully not attended, he is fined, three *paisa* if he comes immediately, one *anna* if he comes within a short time, and two *annas* if he refuses to come altogether. The attendance of the general public at each meeting of the council is therefore considered compulsory and strong action in addition to these formal fines is taken against any adult male who consistently neglects this duty.

Thus all discussions and decisions take place in full public hearing of the community. The public listens to the arguments, or evidence in a case, and hears how a decision has been reached. As soon as the council has come to a decision, one of the permanent members and one of the elders leave the platform and squat before the assembled villagers. They announce the decision and call for opinions. That is, each council decision is followed by an immediate referendum to the general public. If the majority of the public approve, the decision is ratified, as it were, and becomes final. If there is a strong body of opinion in opposition to the council ruling, the two council members return to the platform and there the discussion begins all over again. Some time later a slightly amended decision is reached, and the same procedure is followed of referring this to the general public section of the meeting. If this is still not satisfactory, the council will again take up the discussion. In this way, I have seen a difficult problem (in one case, whether or not an exiled Malani—who had committed a theft from the god's treasury some years ago—be now allowed back into the village) discussed from early one morning till well into the evening of the second day before a decision satisfactory to all was reached. During this time the council was in almost continuous session, breaking off only for meals and sleep, and the procedure outlined above was repeatedly followed until the original vociferous opposition by a strong section of the public was gradually whittled down to negligible proportions. To my mind, the final decision was only a very slightly modified form of the original. The opposition seemed to have been removed less by a succession of compromises than by being simply worn away by incessant argument.

But in rare cases an *impasse* is reached where the council refuses to alter its decision further and where the public is more or less evenly divided in their approval or disapproval. In such a case, the council is dissolved and a general election takes place immediately. Similarly if one *jesta* dies, or is found to be exceedingly officious or otherwise unsatisfactory, or if one of the three *mundie* dies, the council is dissolved and a general election of all eight elders follows.



During my stay in the village, I have not yet witnessed one of these elections but am told by the Malanis that the procedure is as follows. All the adult males of the village are required to assemble before the platform. On the platform, the permanent nucleus of the council—the *Karmisht*, *Pujara*, and *Gur*—sits apart and alone. The assembly squats on the grass quadrangle, each *chug* being grouped slightly apart from the others. The *Karmisht* calls out to the villagers to put forward their representatives to serve on the god's council. Each pair of clans then elects its two elders by majority vote. Only the head of a household is allowed to vote: the principle is "one vote per house". Women have no vote, and in fact may not be present at an election. The low caste Lohars may be present—they sit apart—but do not belong to any *chug*, and therefore have no vote. As the two elders are elected from each *chug*, they leave their group and join the permanent members on the platform. An elder may be re-elected if thought satisfactory by his group. The essential qualifications of a *jesta* are that he must be married, must not be physically maimed or deformed, and he must have been born in the village.

The last election in the village took place about a year ago on the death of the father of the present *Karmisht*. At this time, the former council had been in office for nearly four years. The period between elections is quite irregular. In general practice, however, the old men of the village tell me that an election usually occurs, for one reason or another, every two years or so.

The village council functions in three ways. Firstly, it is the secular government of the village, enacting laws, organizing and controlling communal work such as the repairing of a path or water-mill. Secondly, it acts as Jamlu's "vestry", deciding on what expenditure should be made from the treasury, supervising the god's lands and tenants, arranging for new instruments for the band or the re-building of the temple, and so forth: the conduct of parochial business, as it were. And finally, it acts as the village court to try cases and settle disputes. The judicial function of the council seems to loom largest in the minds of the people, and occupies a considerable portion of its time.

The method of drawing the council's attention to a dispute is fixed and formalised. The man with a grievance goes to the platform and there lights a fire in a special fireplace for this purpose. Here he sits until one of the members of the council happens to pass. On seeing the fire burning, it is the duty of the council member to find out what the matter is and then either to call an immediate meeting of the council or to arrange for one in a day or so.

The day before I write this, Hukmu went to the platform and lit a fire. Shortly afterwards an elder arrived on the scene and asked what the trouble was. Hukmu said that he had been bitten by a neighbour's dog. The elder said that he would call a council meeting for the next day. This morning the council met and called the public to attend. Hukmu then made his complaint and displayed the wound on his leg. The owner of the dog said that it was not his dog but some one else's which had bitten Hukmu. Various witnesses for either side were called, and the council then discussed the matter. It decided that Hukmu was right and ordered the dog to be shot and the owner fined four annas. One permanent member and one elder left the platform and called for opinions from the assembly of villagers. The great majority of the public indicated its approval of the decision which was then put into effect. The council then turned to discuss a forthcoming ceremony connected with the god. This is a trivial case but it illustrates the procedure followed.

Offences are classified into two groups—those held to be serious and those not so serious. The council indicates whether it considers an offence to be serious or not in an institutionalised way. If the particular case being tried is considered grave, the *Karmisht* takes up a piece of stone and draws a line with it on the platform in front of the council. Once the line has been drawn, the council insists that the guilty person pays the exact amount of the fine imposed, and not one anna less. On the other hand, if the case is not considered serious, the line will not be drawn and, though the fine may have been announced as ten rupees, the council will accept whatever the man concerned is willing to pay—perhaps five rupees or even two or three. The line is always drawn in cases of theft,



however minor, and in any cases concerned with the god; the amount of the fine is then paid into the god's treasury. It is only rarely drawn in cases of quarrels, assault, land disputes, and so forth; and the amount of the fine imposed is shared equally among the members of the council. Thus the drawing of the line is a visible indication of the gravity of an offence. (Possibly the English phrase "one must draw the line somewhere" arose in some such manner as this! At all events, the Malanis "draw the line" in fact, as well as verbally.)

Practically all cases are settled by fines which average about two rupees. Any fine over about five rupees is considered a severe punishment and reserved for the more serious cases. The most serious offence of all in the village is said to be theft, particularly theft of any property belonging to the god. Cases of alleged theft are always tried immediately and never postponed. Once convicted, a thief is always punished by a fine of not less than seven rupees (no matter how trivial the theft) and is required to pay to the person robbed double the value of the theft. Theft from the god's treasury incurs complete and permanent ostracism, of which exile from the village is a natural corollary.

The most severe punishment the council can inflict is that of boycott or ostracism. This involves the total withdrawal of social relations either permanently or for a period of time fixed by the council. If a man is ordered to be ostracised, his whole family living in one house are also involved. No one will speak or have any social relations with any member of this household. They are not allowed to draw water from the springs inside the village, may not go to the communal water-mills to grind their grain, may not attend meetings and feasts, and so on. Their social excommunication is complete. Since all council decisions have to be referred to the general public section of the assembly before being ratified, the council are assured of popular support for the final decision. Refusal to pay a fine or to obey a council order runs contrary to popular feeling and, in the circumstances, the enforcement of an order of ostracism is relatively easy. Any member of the village can be ostracised regardless of whether he holds an important political or ritual

office. This boycott is a strong weapon in the hands of the council, and is greatly feared by the villagers.

But, as in all matters in the village, Jamlu is the final authority and, if any individual protests against a council decision, he can appeal to Jamlu and have the case decided by the god. This is done by an ordeal in which two young goats are used. In a civil case, each side supplies a goat. In criminal cases, both goats are paid for out of the god's treasury. The *Pujara* sprinkles water from a special pot belonging to the god over the back of each goat. Then all wait to see which goat will shiver first. The goat shivering first is held to belong to the loser in the dispute. This decision is now absolutely final (since it expresses the personal judgment of Jamlu on the case) and held to be binding on all concerned. Sometimes this ordeal by goat will entirely reverse the decision of the council, but the council members do not seem in the least perturbed when their ruling is thus proved wrong. They appear to feel that it is only human to err sometimes and that, in doubtful cases, the accused can always appeal to the infallible judgment of Jamlu.

Jamlu is not only the final court of appeal in the judicial machinery of the village. He is said to be omniscient and omnipresent, and is regarded as particularly malevolent when his rules (i.e. the custom of the village) are not obeyed. He is believed to punish automatically—by blindness, leprosy, madness, death, and a wide variety of minor ills—any one giving a false oath or attempting to bribe a member of the council. The council members themselves are believed to be exposed to special danger. They are said to suffer speedy punishment from the god should they wilfully give an unfair decision or display special favouritism to relatives or friends. All regardless of rank, wealth, or social status generally must be treated with absolute equality or the wrath of the god is incurred. These ritual sanctions are a potent force in social control and emphasise some of the fundamental values in the society: values which are so important as to be guarded and preserved by the very god himself.

Economically Malana is a poor village and the standard of living is below that of the average Kulu village. The altitude



allows only one crop a year (a poor variety of wheat and buckwheat) and this is often spoilt by heavy snow late in the winter. All the land is owned by Jamlu and the Malanis consider themselves as tenants of the god—though of two classes, permanent (having all rights of sale, inheritance, etc.), and temporary (having these rights at the pleasure of the council, and in return for special payments into the treasury). The Malanis supplement their food supply by bartering *ghi*, wool, honey, and game birds in various Kulu villages for rice and maize, rock salt, and iron for tools. In these transactions, the Malanis dislike taking currency and insist on their traditional barter rates even when these rates are unfavourable to them. This insistence on barter causes much amusement to the more sophisticated Kulu villagers whom I have often seen laugh openly at the Malanis for their excessive "primitiveness". But I detect in this laughter a hollow note, and it is apparent that Kulu villagers regard the Malanis with a mixture of humour and mockery (for being "backward"), and awe or even fear (because of their powerful god, their strong group solidarity, and their wild and uncanny nature). Apart from these economic transactions, the Malanis stay firmly in their mountain fastness, interested only in themselves, and brooking no interference whatsoever from outside.

Malana is essentially a "hermit" village. It has developed an almost fanatical sense of difference, of village cohesion, and of intense group loyalty. All who do not "belong" are treated with virulent suspicion and even contempt. No matter how open and friendly one is to them, this suspicion can only be allayed, rarely dispelled completely. At the first favourable opportunity, it bubbles again to the surface and erupts like a volcano. As one Kulu villager said to me: "Malana is like a walnut. It has a very hard shell outside but is pleasant enough once cracked open." This is undoubtedly true but, as I have found, one of the greatest difficulties in penetrating the formidable social barriers that surround the village lies in the problem of steering a neutral course through the political currents in the village. Malana is united against all outsiders and its social structure provides a good case of extreme social integration. Yet there is nonetheless a constant struggle for

power between the three "leaders" based on the dual territorial division. Within the severe limits imposed by the overall cohesion, there is an interesting concept of opposition and balance between the two *behrs*, and a good deal of political intrigue.

The most striking fact about the political and judicial organization of the village appears to be the extent to which it rests on public sentiment. The system of election, the necessity for an immediate referendum and ratification of each council decision, the importance of ostracism as a penal sanction, the compulsory attendance of all adult males at every council meeting—all illustrate the sovereign power of public opinion. The village is intensely egalitarian and has a well-developed sense of justice as an abstract concept. Perhaps the primary integrating force in the society is the village god whose influence plays a vital part in the whole social mechanism of government and law. All in all the village provides an interesting example of advanced political and legal concepts obtaining in an entirely illiterate and economically backward society.

It would perhaps be apt to conclude with the following quotation from a book by Lieut.-Col. C. G. Bruce (*Kulu and Lahoul*, Arnold, London, 1914):

"We had a good look . . . at the main Malana valley, and at the track which joins the Parbatti at Jari, a fearsome path down a most impressive and precipitous gorge. Immense cliffs, many thousand feet high on each side, dominated the end of the valley by a mass of mountains, and the best part of eight thousand feet of precipices. No wonder the people of Malana have been able to lead their own life unmolested for so many centuries . . . . No more desperate country have I seen in the lower heights of the mountains."



Kathleen Gough

## The Social Structure of a Tanjore Village

Two types of village structure appear to be present in Tanjore district. The most prevalent is the *mirāsi* village, where the land is owned in small amounts by a number of separate patrilineal joint-families. This type apparently dates in its essential features, from the period of the Tamil Chola Kings, whose power declined with the Muslim invasions of the early fourteenth century, and ended with the invasion from Vijayanagar in 1534. The other type, the *inām* village, dates from the Mahrata conquest (1674-1799) when the alien Mahrata kings made grants of whole villages to individual families of Tamil Brahmans and immigrant Mahratas and to religious institutions. Here, I attempt to outline the social organization of a *mirāsi* village in the north-west of the district, and to indicate what seem, after four months of observation, to be the most important trends of change.

Tanjore village people divide the many castes of Hindus into three subdivisions: Brahman, non-Brahman and Ādi Drāvida ("original Dravidians", sometimes called Harijans, most of whom were once serfs of the soil). The structure of a *mirāsi* village varies according to whether it is a "Brahman" or a "non-Brahman village". In the "Brahman village", the land is owned by the several families of a Brahman street (*agrahāram*). Some of this land is leased in small amounts on an annual tenure to landless families of one or more non-Brahman streets, usually of the "lower" non-Brahman castes of Ahambadiyas, Padayachis, Konar, Muppanar or Vanniyar. Other land, retained by the landlords (who are called *mirāsīdārs*), is cultivated directly by labourers from an Ādi Drāvida street situated at some distance from the rest of the village. In the "non-Brahman village", the land is owned by joint families of a street of non-Brahmans, usually of one of the "higher" non-Brahman castes of Vellālar or Kallar. Some land may be then leased to other, "lower caste" non-Brahmans, or more

frequently cultivated directly with the aid of Ādi Drāvida servants. In these villages there is usually only a single Brahman family, of priests who serve the village temple.

Kumbapettai is a fairly typical "Brahman village". One-and-a-half square miles, with a population of about 1,200, it lies on a bus route eight miles from a town. Behind each house in the streets is a small garden of coconuts and vegetables, while round the whole village, for about half a mile, stretch its double-crop paddy fields, watered by the intricate system of irrigation channels from the Kāveri and its tributaries.

Just off the main road, in the north-east of the village, lies the Brahman street of forty-six houses, ten of which are now empty, their owners having moved to the towns. The tile-roofed houses adjoin, and the two long rows face each other across the narrow road. Behind the houses, on each side of the street, the gardens lead down to irrigation channels bordering the paddy fields. Two temples stand near the *agrahāram*: that to Siva, in the north-east, and that to Vishnu, in the west. Nearby are a bathing tank, a shrine to Ganapathi near which the Brahmans recite daily *Jabams* after performing their ablutions, and a second shrine built over the tomb of a Brahman *sanyāsi* of the village. The Brahmans, with their gardens, temples, bathing pool and caste-shrines, thus occupy the north-west corner of the village. A single non-Brahman house of Kutthādis, a caste whose men formerly performed religious puppet plays and whose women are dancing girls, stands alone on the north-west boundary of the village.

Southwards, across garden and paddy land, lie twenty houses, in two streets, of the non-Brahman Konar caste. The Konar are cowherds by tradition. Their houses are smaller than the Brahman houses, thatched, and set slightly apart in their gardens. Today, the income (derived from all sources) of Brahman families living entirely in the village, varies from about Rs. 80 to about Rs. 900 a month. The average Konar household, by contrast, appears to earn one *kalam* of paddy per adult per month, *plus* Rs. 20 to Rs. 60 in cash, thus bringing the value of the total income to between Rs. 50 and Rs. 100 per month. Ādi Drāvida families, by contrast again, appear to demand rather more paddy and less cash; the average income



of an Ādi Drāvida household may be estimated very roughly at a value of between Rs. 40 and Rs. 80 per month. Most Konar families keep one or two cows, and in addition milk the cows and do garden work for Brahmans. Their service was formerly hereditary; the same families served Brahman families for generations and could not change their allegiance without consent from their original masters. Today, individual Konar men, like Ādi Drāvidas, sometimes become "attached" for a period to a particular Brahman landlord through indebtedness; they borrow money from the landlord and must then work only for him until the debt is repaid. In the old type of service, in which families of Konar and Ādi Drāvidas worked by hereditary right for Brahman families, the servants were called *adimai* (serfs). This word is now seldom heard. A few people, both Konar and Ādi Drāvida, do, however, still work from choice for their traditional masters, who distinguish between hereditary servants and hired labourers, and feel greater responsibility for the former, giving them gifts at marriages and sending food during sickness. Hereditary servants are paid at least partly in paddy, which they prefer. An ordinary hired labourer may be paid daily in the same way, or monthly in cash; he is called a *pannaiyāl* (workman).

Konar are also tenants to Brahman landlords, usually to the men whom they serve. The tenure is called *kuthakai*. An annual rent in paddy is fixed according to the fertility of the soil, and paid in two instalments, after the two harvests in February and October. In a bumper year, the tenant may retain one-third or even half the crop after his rent is paid; in a bad year (like the present one) he may lose all or retain just enough for the next year's seed and cultivation expenses. The landlord may theoretically demand the whole rent in paddy or its equivalent in cash at the controlled price, whatever the harvest, and a very few do so. Most know their tenants' circumstances and give small concessions in a bad harvest. Always, however, the power of eviction puts the tenant at his landlord's mercy. A few fields in Kumbapettai are given on *vāram* tenure. The tenant takes a fixed fraction of the crop, usually one-fifth, and surrenders the rest to the owner. Though unprofitable, the tenure is a more certain one for the tenant in

a bad year, and with the recent succession of poor harvests some tenants have come to prefer it.

Also in the Konar streets live the village servant castes; one family each of barbers, washermen, carpenters and blacksmiths, and three of potters. These all inter-marry and inter-dine only in their own castes, and so have links with other villages. Formerly, all landlords and tenants paid them twice annually in paddy; today, they are often paid in cash after each job of work.

These non-Brahman streets are traditional in the village, but two other streets of non-Brahmans have grown up in the past fifty years. They live on the eastern boundary of the village, on a tract of garden land once granted as *inām* to a Mahrata servant of the Rajas. The Mahrata family lost its wealth during British rule and sold the land fifty years ago to rising non-Brahman families from other villages. These now include six houses of Nādār, a "low" non-Brahman caste of toddy-tappers; five houses of Kallar paddy merchants; a poor Brahman family who have set up a "hotel"; and single houses of Mahratas, Padayachis and Konar from neighbouring villages who serve Brahmans or outside landlords for a monthly wage in cash. Both Kallar and Nādār lease some land from the Brahmans, but families of both also now own a few acres of their own, and lease other land from Muslim traders of the nearby town who have recently bought land from emigrating Brahman households. The Nādārs tapped toddy before prohibition, and still work as coolies, for a wealthy trader of their own caste some six miles away; while the Kallar depend mainly for their living on transporting the landlords' paddy to a ricemill, three miles away, whence the rice is passed on to the district supply office. These two streets of new-comers, only partly integrated in the village economy, will be seen to be important when we consider trends of change in Kumbapettai.

Finally, half a mile south across paddy fields, lies a large Ādi Drāvida street of about eighty houses. These are the Pallas, a caste of *adimai* (serfs) who were formerly "owned" by the landlords. Today, they too lease *kuthakai* lands and work in the paddy fields for a daily wage, in some cases for



their traditional masters. Unlike the Konar, they were traditionally prohibited from entering the Brahman street, and none do so today. Conversely, Brahmans may not enter the Ādi Drāvida street; to do so would, it is believed, bring misfortune on its inhabitants. Also in the south is a small street of Parayas, the "lowest" Ādi Drāvida caste whose traditional work is to remove and sell the carcasses of dead animals and to watch over the cremation grounds at night. Parayas, like Pallas, work for day wages in the fields, though, unlike Pallas, they are not "attached" to particular families of Brahmans.

Having outlined the caste groups, we may see where lie the most fundamental unities and cleavages within the village structure. Most striking in a Tanjore village is the unity of the individual caste group: this was usually, until recently, the unity of a single street. The members of a caste within one village are first united by similarity of occupation, of rights in the land, of income, and of ritual beliefs and practices. Formerly, all the Brahmans were *mirāsḍārs*, all the Konar *kuthakai* tenants, and all the Ādi Drāvidas, landless labourers. The non-Brahmans are set off from the Brahmans by numerous differences of custom, chief of which are that Brahmans, unlike most non-Brahmans, eschew meat, fish and eggs, and do not perform animal sacrifices in temples. We have already mentioned the Brahmanical temples; these, now officially open to all castes, are still almost exclusively used by Brahmans, though non-Brahmans (but not Ādi Drāvidas) occasionally enter the outer court at a festival of the Sanskrit deities. The Konar have their own village goddess (*grāma devatā*) housed in a shrine between the Konar streets. Her name means "Konar mother of the village"; she is outside the Brahmanical pantheon of deities; and she is propitiated daily by a non-Brahman priest and annually, with sacrifices, at a festival peculiar to Konar. The Pallas, similarly, have a shrine to the goddess Kāliamman which stands at the end of their street. Only they may worship her, and she has a separate priest and annual festival.

Other ritual symbols and institutions emphasize the unity of the caste. Brahmans possess a single cremation ground; Konar now share theirs with the other incoming non-Brahman

castes; and both Pallas and Parayas have their separate burial grounds. Bathing pools, again, are distributed between the three major groups of castes. Births, marriages, deaths, and propitiations of ancestral spirits, associated as they are with the intimacy of family life, are intra-caste events. This is of course in harmony with caste endogamy and with the fact that (with the exception of the servant castes who marry between villages) each caste street formed until recently a group of inter-marrying kin. In the Brahman street, caste unity is even more apparent than among non-Brahmans. Houses adjoin, and there are even holes in the dividing walls through which women may pass messages to each other.

Caste unity, and the authoritarian role of the landlords, appears again in village administration. The village forms a local revenue unit under a village headman appointed by Government. The headman must collect the revenue from *mirāsdārs*, and has the right to try small civil cases within the village. He is assisted by a clerk, and commands the services of two revenue collectors and a peon. Theoretically, these officials may be of any caste; actually, of course, the headman and clerk are Brahmans and the three servants, non-Brahmans. In addition, the village forms a *pañchāyat* under an elected *pañchāyat* board with a president and seven members. The board control a fund derived from a small portion of the village revenue; their chief work is to maintain roads and wells. As might be expected, all are Brahmans, since Brahmans own the land of the village. The relatively modern institutions of village headman and *pañchāyat* board have, in fact, been welded into a much older form of administration which is still of great importance. With the exception of the Brahmans, each caste street annually elects two headmen (*nattanmakkar* or *talaivar*) who are responsible for maintaining order in the street. Any offence such as theft, adultery, assault, or encroachment on another's land, demands the attention of the headmen, who haul the culprit before an assembly of men of the street. Pallas hold their meetings before the Kāliamman shrine; Konar, in the yard of the village goddess temple. If the offence is slight, the headmen may pronounce justice, themselves administering a fine or a public whipping. In a more serious



dispute, the Brahman landlords of the culprits must be called to ratify the headmen's decisions and themselves execute judgment. In particular, any dispute affecting the reputation or the general peace of the village requires Brahman intervention. In a recent case, a Palla stole a brass vessel from the non-Brahman street of a neighbouring village. Having caught him, the owner sent him, bound and escorted by two Pallas of the offended village, back to his own landlord for justice. The Brahman landlord of our Palla called a meeting of the thief's caste fellows in the yard of the village goddess temple. There he elicited the facts of the case, exacted a fine of Rs. 10, administered a whipping, and obliged the culprit to drink a pot of cowdung mixed with water, "to humble him", as he said. The whole caste group retired, satisfied that justice had been done. The Brahmans themselves have no headmen, and rely less on arbitrators to settle their private disputes. This is in keeping with their position of authority in the village and with the fact that in general, Brahmans admit no superiors and pay less formal respect to their elders within the caste. It is difficult to say how Brahman disputes are settled. A few go now to the urban courts; many drag on for months, kept in check by the need to maintain Brahman unity and authority before the lower castes, until at last the ritual obligations of kinship force the opponents to co-operate.

In a Tanjore village, the unity of the caste street overrides the individuality of the dwelling-group, thus contrasting with the situation in a Malabar village. There, as Dr. Miller has described, the land of a whole village may be owned by a single landlord family, often of the Nambudiri Brahman sub-caste. Among the Nayar landholders of the village, each large matrilineal dwelling-group stands supreme in its ancestral garden, shut in by walls or hedges and with its own cremation ground, ancestor shrine, snake-grove, and often, goddess temple. In Tanjore, despite the ownership of land by patrilineal joint-families, the dwelling-group has no such individual strength. Kinship ties, instead of being strongly unilineal, as in Malabar, ramify widely in both paternal and maternal lines; the joint-family divides every generation; and the local group of agnatic kin (*kootam*—comparable to the Nayar matrilineal

*taravād*) lacks corporate unity and is bound only by the observance of death pollution. Houses and ancestral land are readily bought and sold. The history of land rights in Tanjore villages is relevant to this contrast. For until 1865, the land in *mirāsi* villages was not owned by patrilineal joint-families at all, but held in common by the whole caste group of *mirāsdārs* of the village, who periodically apportioned shares by mutual consent for the maintenance of their separate families. In Kumbapettai, this institution persists in the "common lands" and "common money" of the Brahmans. Their cremation ground, certain threshing grounds, a stretch of garden land, and the fishing rights in their bathing pool all fall under this category, the income derived from these common possessions being devoted to the temple funds. In short, the Hindu joint-family organization appears to be at its weakest in Tanjore, and at its strongest, in Malabar, the reverse being true of the unity of the local caste group. The two areas probably represent the extreme of variation within a basically common South Indian pattern.

As in all Indian villages, however, a unity of the whole village overrides the separateness of each caste. The basis of this unity is the economic inter-dependence of landlords, tenants, labourers and village servants, and its perpetuation, in my view, depends on the maintenance of these economic arrangements. In everyday life, this unity of the village is hidden beneath the separate economic, social and ritual activities of each caste and each dwelling-group; it is sometimes temporarily rent by quarrels between individuals or between kin-groups. Periodically, however, some event, ceremonial or haphazard, occurs at which the unity of the village is affirmed. Such events always relate to the welfare of the village as a whole rather than of any single part of it. Concern for the welfare of the village is expressed in the institution of the *grāma devata* or village deity. This deity is always primarily a possession of the non-Brahmans of the village: in Kumbapettai, the goddess is herself a Konar woman who died of small-pox, and the temple priest is a non-Brahman. But besides being a deity of the Konar, propitiated by them at their own annual festival, the goddess commands the allegiance of both Brahmans and Ādi Drāvidas at specific times of the year. Her shrine



stands on a boundary of the village and her idol is believed to protect the whole community from crop failure, infectious diseases, female barrenness and deaths in child-birth. Households of all castes propitiate her, in terms of their particular ritual idioms, in cases of insanity, barrenness or disease. By far the chief event in the village calendar is the larger, fifteen-day festival to the goddess celebrated by the whole village in the summer season. At this festival, the image of the deity is nightly taken in procession through the streets of the village and propitiated in every street in a manner peculiar to the caste. As in all parts of South India, the village temple festival dramatizes the separateness and also the inter-dependence between castes and the need for their co-operation. Of recent years, since new-comers of diverse non-Brahman castes came to Kumbapettai, there have been disputes concerning precedence in the rites. These once settled, the rank of a particular family in the total village structure becomes publicly accepted.

Other events and festivals unite the village as a whole. Chief of these are Pongal, the annual festival for the harvest of the second crop in January, and the day of the first ceremonial ploughing, at the start of the Tamil New Year. It is interesting to note that fights between neighbouring villages often take place on one or another of these festival days, thus further reinforcing the unity of the village as a whole. Spectators from neighbouring villages, coming to watch the fun after their own celebrations are over, or if their own take place on another day, have several times recently fallen foul of Kumbapettai non-Brahmans and Ādi Drāvidas, so that a pitched battle with stones and staffs resulted. The ability to mass forces against interfering outsiders is a measure of the unity and self-sufficiency of the village. So, too, is the degree to which crime and scandal are kept within the confines of the village. Until recently, the police had little part to play in Kumbapettai, for the village was united against outside legal interference. Two murders and three suicides have, in the past fifteen years, been disposed of and hushed up by village authorities, the police being quietly bribed and sent about their business.

The stability of the traditional village organization may be seen as a balancing out of various unities and antagonisms

which cut across each other. We have mentioned the unity and separateness of the local caste group, and this, no doubt, has always been accompanied by a certain antagonism between the three major groups of castes—an antagonism always engendered by differences of wealth, of custom, and of interests in the economic resources. But this antagonism could not, traditionally, break out into a quarrel between two whole groups of castes. Non-Brahmans could not, for example, rise up as a body and combat their Brahman landlords. There are several reasons for this, the chief being the lack of economic corporateness of each caste group. Konar and Ādi Drāvidas were employed not as whole castes, by all the Brahmans collectively, but in separate families, by individual families of landlords. The system of tenure, and the landlord's traditionally recognised power of eviction, keeps the separate families of non-Brahmans competing against each other for land and for employment. Perhaps a more important factor was the sanction given to the traditional rights between castes by ritual beliefs and by moral maxims acceptable to the society as a whole. It is these beliefs, together with their continued economic dependence on the Brahmans, which even today prevent Ādi Drāvidas from entering the Brahman street and temples, lest the deity should take vengeance on them in the form of disease or death.

As long as the system remained stable, therefore, it seems as though, in spite of covert antagonism between people of different castes, that is between the members of groups of different order in the society, open quarrels demanding united action on the part of the group could take place only between groups of the same order—for example between branches of the same joint-family, joint-families of the same caste-group, between all non-Brahmans or all Ādi Drāvidas of adjacent villages. Such quarrels are still common, and cut across, and therefore weaken, the cleavages between castes in the village. Even today, indeed, when the system is far from stable and antagonisms between castes have deepened, it is possible to find two Brahman landlords dragged into opposite sides of a quarrel which began between their Ādi Drāvida servants. So strong, still, are the traditional feudal obligations and loyalties between individual families of different castes.



Today, however, the village structure presents no longer a nice balance of unities and antagonisms between caste and kinship groups in a self-sufficient little republic. For obviously, the economic basis of the system has been fundamentally upset within the last fifty to seventy years. It is impossible to enumerate all the ways in which this has happened, but we may mention a few. Most important in Kumbapettai, is the departure to urban work of a large number of Brahman families and individuals. A few of these have sold their lands to middle-class trading families of the nearby town; the majority leave their empty houses locked and return after each harvest to collect their rents, now in cash. Many of these men will return to Kumbapettai on retirement from a Government post; some, after more than half a life-time away in the towns of South India, have already done so. One result is that the number of competent young or middle-aged Brahman men left to manage the affairs of Kumbapettai is very few, while those who do remain tend to feel inferior and swamped by their more adventurous kinsmen. Relations between absentee landlord and tenant are unsatisfactory. Often, the landlord barely knows his tenants by name and knows nothing about their circumstances or the business of cultivation. Often his only interest in the village is to take away money from it twice annually; a few landlords of Kumbapettai do not know the site and acreage of their lands. Among both Ādi Drāvidas and the poorer Konar tenants it is beginning to be said in secret that such owners have no right to their lands; since, as Brahmans, they no longer spend their lives in praying for the community and administering its affairs, they should no longer share its income. To this the Brahmans reply that without urban work they can no longer maintain their standard of living; and this, considering the increase in population and the small size of holdings, is indeed usually true. The bad harvests of the last few years have of course exacerbated the opposition between landlord and tenant. One temporary solution would seem to lie in fixity of tenure and the fixing of fairer rents; but there is no doubt that absentee landlordism and the tendency (less in Kumbapettai than in some other villages) towards the amassing of large

estates by a few landlord families, must soon be checked by more drastic remedies.

A stronger blow has been dealt at the Kumbapettai social system by the influx, in the last fifty years, of the two new streets of mixed non-Brahman castes. These, owing no traditional allegiance to the Brahmans, tend to resent their authority and to set up an administration of their own. In one street, the Nādār have founded a shrine to a local non-Brahman *sanyāsi*, and recently assemblies of the two new streets, and sometimes also of the Konar, have met to settle their disputes before this shrine rather than before the village goddess temple, and have declined to call in Brahmans to ratify their judgments. The standard of living of the families in these two streets, partly employed as they are in trade and by landlords from outside the village, tends to be higher than that of other non-Brahmans and allows them to dictate terms to the local landlords. The Kallar paddy merchant's family, in particular, have become powerful non-Brahman leaders; though hand-in-glove with the landlords in the sale of black-market rice, this rising middle-class family refuse to observe all the old rules of ritual pollution with their employers; one of their sons, together with two other non-Brahman boys of incoming families, attends high school with the Brahman youths.

It is important to notice that the people who oppose the traditional village system are not those who suffer most acutely under it, but those who have partly extricated themselves from it through some change in their economic circumstances. It is not, for example, the very poor Konar tenants in Kumbapettai who support the anti-Brahman Dravida Kazhagam movement, but rather the somewhat wealthier and more independent "up-starts" of the two new streets, and to a much larger extent, the new, independent non-Brahman landlords of neighbouring villages, who resent the orthodox Brahman's unwillingness to treat them as his ritual equals. Communist supporters, again, appear to be stronger among landless, high school educated youths of any caste and among Ādi Drāvidas who had temporarily left their natal village, tried many jobs and come home to find the *status quo* too conservative for them, than among regular labourers still attached to their traditional



masters. There is no doubt, moreover, that the traditional forms of "caste distinction" against which official propaganda is so much directed will disappear from the village only when the old economic arrangements which allow of high caste authoritarianism have been more thoroughly undermined. In Kumbapettai, the gradual drift to the cities of an educated aristocracy, the transfer of land to middle-class trading families of the towns, and the infiltration of a small, autonomous working-class group supported by urban forms of labour, have begun this process, and it may be expected to continue until the village has lost its traditional integration and become little more than a unit of neighbourhood.

*David G. Mandelbaum*

**Technology, Credit and  
Culture  
in a Nilgiri Village**

FORMERLY a tribal people, the Kota of the Nilgiri Hills are now subject to the same forces which affect villagers in South India generally. The seven Kota villages are interspersed among those of the ancient inhabitants of the Nilgiris.

Kota economy was aboriginally geared to a caste-like division of labour with three other tribes. In return for the iron tools, wooden utensils, pots, and music which they provided, the Kota received traditionally fixed contributions. From the Toda, the Kota obtained buffalo carcasses and some dairy products; from the Kurumba they procured magical protection and some forest produce; and from the most numerous people, the agricultural Badaga, they received grain.

A Kota family would grow some of its own foodstuff, but depended considerably on the grain income from the Badaga for its annual food supply. Each Kota family had a number of Badaga families whom it alone supplied with Kota products and services and from whom only that Kota family received tithes of grain. If a Kota family felt that one of its associated Badaga families was not fulfilling the expected reciprocal obligations, it would withdraw from the co-operative arrangement. No other Kotas would then enter into a reciprocal alliance with that Badaga family, and in serious cases would break off relations with the entire Badaga village. Under earlier conditions, the sanction of non-co-operation was a most effective one, because without Kota help a Badaga would find it difficult or impossible to get tools with which to cultivate his fields, pots in which to cook his food, and the music imperative for his major ceremonies. Such interdependent relationships have long been characteristic in village India as well as among these tribes.

The successful operation of this sanction and of the whole system of inter-tribal relations pivoted on the Kota economic monopolies and on the internal cohesion of the tribe. In recent



decades the monopolies have ceased to exist and patterns of internal cohesion have become lax. For over a century past, English officials, European missionaries, and migrants—both Hindu and Muslim—from the neighbouring plains have come into the Nilgiri plateau. For many years the advent of these new-comers had remarkably little effect on the relations among the Nilgiri tribes. Then, in the last twenty-five years, changes have come with a rush.

Most Badagas, who now buy tools and utensils in the bazaars of the Nilgiri towns, also stopped using Kota music at ceremonies. With the income from the Badagas thus curtailed, the Kotas had to increase their agricultural efforts. Like the other cultivators of the Nilgiri area, they have concentrated on the growing of a cash crop, potatoes. The Kota use potatoes occasionally in curries, but do not consider potatoes to be a real food. Hence, they must buy foodgrains with the cash derived from the potato crop.

Once a Kota begins to raise potatoes on his land, he cannot readily go back to subsistence cultivation. Potato cultivation is done with the spading fork rather than with the traditional plough. Partly because draught animals are no longer necessary for agricultural technology and partly because the expansion of acreage under cultivation has reduced the pasture land available, the number of cattle has declined. This has sharply curtailed the supply of organic fertilizers which are necessary for a good crop yield of grain. Moreover potato cultivation demands the use of artificial fertilizers and these may be obtained only for cash which is obtainable by the Kota only through potato cultivation.

Thus the Kota villager must buy commercial fertilizers in order to raise a crop of any kind. He can get the cash or the credit with which to buy fertilizers only for growing potatoes.

Credit, for most Kota cultivators, is essential for their economic operations. Some Kota have utilised the Government-sponsored co-operative credit association. But as not uncommonly happens elsewhere in India, the Kota villager has generally found the bureaucratic organization of these credit co-operatives too rigid and has not used this service regularly despite the lower rates of interest charged.

Not only is the Kota villager dependent on the supply and price of fertilizer but he is also dependent on the supply and price of foodgrains in the local ration shop. The food rationing system operates even in the smallest Kota hamlet. The villager must take the kind of grain allotted to his ration shop and, in the past few years of mounting inflation, his money has brought less food than before.

The rush of recent change has also weakened the internal cohesion of the village. Formerly a villager who transgressed the traditional patterns would be subjected by the other villagers to the sanction of non-co-operation. This sanction was a serious penalty in intra-tribal as well as inter-tribal affairs because an individual could not make a living alone even if he were able to withstand the psychological hardship of social isolation. Most economic operations required the work of a team of villagers and a man who could not work as part of a team had little chance of earning a livelihood. Now, however, a man can stand alone economically because there are many low-landers available to be hired as labourers. The number of those in the Kota village of Kolmel who have broken with some of the old traditions and have ignored the displeasure of the conservative villagers has grown until the village is divided into two factions. The members of one faction do not inter-dine or co-operate or worship with the members of the other faction. The old unity of the village as against other groups is no longer manifest.

In place of the old economic dependence on the supply of Badaga grain, the Kota villager is now dependent on the supply of fertilizer available from the factory, on the purchasing power of his money, on the vagaries of supply in the ration shop. The great difference is not in the fact of economic dependence but in the fact that formerly the Kota had some control over the peoples on whom they were dependent. They have no control over the peoples and forces on whom they are presently dependent. This frustration has made for greater hostilities between Kota and Badaga as well as between conservative and reform factions within the village. Some hostility is also directed toward the Government. Similar situations prevail widely in Indian villages.



*McKim Marriott*

## Social Structure and Change in a U.P. Village

THE social structure of many Hindu villages raises problems for concerted action which must be squarely faced by all who would speculate upon or plan for the real future of rural India. Kishan Garhi, a village of 850 persons in the Agra division in the upper Ganges-Jamna Doab, is a fair specimen of the complex village settlements which crowd the most productive agricultural areas of the nation. The present situation there and the trends which have created it may well give pause for thought.

Kishan Garhi, with its 160 mud houses, is again half as large as the average U. P. village. Its greater size allows it to include a fortress mound belonging to four one-time landlords, and a large number of specialists (forty-five houses) and traders (ten houses)—small but vital elements of rural life—as well as the agricultural core of tenant farmers (sixty-eight houses) and landless agricultural labourers (thirty-four houses).

### ECONOMIC GROUPINGS

The rich alluvial plain where Kishan Garhi's 535 acres lie is extremely flat—so flat that a rise or fall of two inches in a field may be worthy of close attention. Two inches more or less in the amount of the monsoon rainfall may be worth relatively little notice to farmers here, for the summer crops of sorghum, millet and maize provide hardly a quarter of human foodgrains. Most crops and nearly all foodgrains are grown only by dint of sustained irrigation from some fifty wells, each more than thirty feet deep. From June through August and from October through March, teams of two men prod a pair or two of oxen which tread the well-ramps, hoisting twenty-gallon buckets of water. A boy guides the water through raised channels to moisten the squared fields of wheat, barley, oilseeds, peas and gram. In the April harvest there may be some advantage if six

or eight men work side by side for a day or two on the fields of one man's holding. But no other agricultural operation—ploughing, smoothing, weeding or threshing—demands the simultaneous work of more than three persons. The yield of these labours is a sufficiency of fodder for some 400 animals, a moderate quantity of oilseeds for sale and a slight surplus of foodgrains beyond the appetites of the villagers themselves.

Work groups were always small, and with subdivision of the average family holding from twelve acres to six acres over the past fifty years, work groups even of small size have come to be less sustained. But the problems of essential co-operation are tremendous and growing. Since the average holding has now come to be divided into nine non-contiguous plots, the success of one man's crops depends on his maintaining good relations with many among the fifteen persons who ordinarily constitute his field-neighbours. No more than one-half of the tiny work groups can consist of fellow members of the same caste and lineage. Even the landlord rights have come to be complexly divided, changing from four units eighty years ago to twelve separately managed units at present.

Economic dependencies a generation back constituted much larger and much more inclusive groupings. These were focussed quite narrowly on a few persons of outstanding wealth and power. Before the Agra Tenancy Act of 1926, for access to land, half of the cultivators were dependent on short-term, often unwritten leases granted by one of three families of a single lineage of landlords. The landlords in those days kept a third of the village lands in their direct control—one-fifth for their "personal" cultivation through servants, and the rest in forest, pasture, road and house areas for the enjoyment of their followers. Most persons were borrowers of grain and money, and most had then to turn to two or three wealthier tenants or to the same landlords for credit. Disabled by debt, many of the thirty families of landless labourers worked year after year for one tenant or landlord master. Heavy debtors could never repay fully nor could they readily shift their debts from one creditor to another. But the world depression, followed by new tenancy legislation and recently by rising crop prices helped to unbind many of the older land-and-debt-dependencies.



Five families of landlords and two of tenant-lenders were themselves bankrupted. The forest and pasture lands were all parcelled out to tenants for cultivation. Most of the tenants were made secure, their rents reduced and fixed. The landlords' personal fields were whittled away: in 1952 there remained but a single tenant-at-will of one landlord. But sub-tenants and share-croppers are now an increasing class of cultivators. For fear of the sub-letting clauses of the 1939 tenancy laws, they are moved about every year, or at the most, every two years. Labourers are rarely kept by an employer for longer than the six-month winter watering season. Groupings whose form is determined by economic dependency have thus generally become smaller and looser. They no longer clearly organize the village into segments of distinct allegiance.

A similar break-up of larger dependent segments has overtaken the artisans and servants. The third of the village people who live in part by means other than cultivation—priest, accountant, carpenter, barber, water-carrier, potter, tailor, cotton-carder, weaver, musician, leatherworker, washerman, sweeper, hunter, and so on—find more than half of their clientele in ten farming hamlets outside of Kishan Garhi. Until a generation ago, most of the specialists were aligned as retainers of one or another of the landlord families of this area, and as servants of that family's tenants. These old segmental clienteles have now dissolved into diffuse networks of relationships with many more equal clients. Most farming households still strive to retain at least six permanent servants on semi-annual and piece-work *jājmāni* fees. The small plots granted eighty years ago by the landlords in return for special services have now mostly been subdivided beyond the point of significant utility. Although *jājmāni* relations between servants and clients are considered to be heritable, half of the servants now shift clients with each generation.

Paralleling the clear, old hierarchy of economic power thirty years ago was an informal but compelling structure of power. The landlords were the law for all purposes beyond the caste councils. The landlords maintained their own court and record room, and dealt summarily with offenders through the strength of their dependent followers. One or another landlord always

held the office of police headman (*mukhya*) for Kishan Garhi. Village crimes and disputes could reach formal trial in the district courts only with the support of one of the landlords or principal tenants. But unrivalled economic eminence has now slipped from the hands of the petty landlords of Kishan Garhi, and they have seen their power and influence jolting downward. The village thereby lost old leaders.

#### KINSHIP GROUPINGS

The work groups, classes and dependent clusters whose progressive fragmentation is described above comprise only the economic solidarities of Kishan Garhi society. They are intersected and complicated by two other kinds of social structures, those of kinship and those of rank.

The twenty-four local caste groups of Kishan Garhi, themselves like large kinship groupings, have been stable over many years. The number of persons within any one caste in the villages averages thirty-five, or five and one-half households. The smaller caste groups in many instances comprise but a single family. The largest caste group, that of the Brahmans, who are here mainly farmers, has forty-three households, and is followed in order of size by the local caste groups of the Chamārs, Jāts, Kumhārs and Muslim Faqirs, each of which numbers more than ten families. Most castes and some of their lineages have particular sacred stones and trees for worship; some once had a number of distinctive gods and rituals.

Each local caste group of Kishan Garhi comprises one or several lineages—patrilineal and patrilocal kin groups. Each lineage is named or nicknamed after a prominent member, or according to some traditional attribute or ritual duty. The lineages of Kishan Garhi have been augmented during the past generation by the immigration of twenty-five new families—relatives by marriage—encouraged by the heritability and greater permanence of tenant holdings gained under successive land laws. Since each lineage demands extensive and exclusive loyalty to itself, the multiplication of lineages to the present number of forty-six makes the problem of village organization much more acute.



The members of kin groups have now come to act together in certain ways less readily than they did eighty years ago. Tenant families belonging to the same lineage often used to cultivate jointly the lands that any individual among them held on lease from the landlord. The one or two names listed in the accountant's books were felt to stand adequately for the rights of the much larger joint family group. As many as six or seven connected households often worked together in this way, dividing their investment and profit according to ability and need, and maintaining a common store of grain for common ceremonies and emergencies. Beyond the joint family but within the larger lineage group there was less intense co-operation, yet strong preference was given to lineage members in making loans and exchanges. Support could be expected by any member when necessity arose. Agrarian legislation over the past eighty years has made tenant holdings more stable and thereby eliminated some of the flexible old arrangements for sharing. Bitter experience with individual treachery based on technicalities of the altered land laws has now changed the extent of co-operation materially within many lineages. At each new settlement and recently during the granting of proprietary certificates under the Zamindari Abolition Act, joint holdings have been more frequently listed in the names of all male members of the group. Many cultivating families welcome such opportunities to register each individual's exact interest in the group holding without the costs of a court fight. Even minor children's names are now entered as individual sharers. In this way, popular changes in the agrarian structure have been quietly accomplishing a progressive division in family interests similar to that which has been feared and opposed as a possible effect of the provisions for feminine inheritance in the Hindu Code Bill.

The artisans, menials and landless labourers have not, of course, lost forms of co-operation dependent upon their own joint management of lands. But they, like most castes, have seen the discipline of their caste councils lose force. This loss of force seems to have been occasioned by an increasing differentiation of the statuses of individuals within each caste, by widened contacts with less constrained ways of life outside the

village (hastened by emigration from the crowded lands) and by internal dissension of a kind which has grown to be pervasive throughout village life. The loss of force has also been paralleled and possibly helped by an accelerating loss of distinctive elements of caste culture once associated with particular occupations and ritual duties. The special religions of the lower castes have been giving way to ceremonies imitated from the Brahmans and from the generalized neo-Hinduism of the cities.

Only the Jat landlords of Kishan Garhi maintain some semblance of effective agnatic organization beyond the village. But the landlords are a special case; their lineage in the village represents a junior line of a famous clan whose domain comprises several hundreds of villages in the Agra division. Their ancestors' conquest of Kishan Garhi in relatively recent centuries and their continued association with a royal house keeps them in touch with a regional organization of descent larger than that of the settled cultivators or even of the spatially more mobile artisan castes. Stimulated by the changing economic fortunes of the past generation, there have been many dissensions within the local landlord lineage. At the same time, the landlords' wider clan organization has if anything grown stronger, since many of its members have taken over Government and party jobs which require a background of wealth and education that only the landlord class possessed.

All of the kin groups of Kishan Garhi have vital connections outside the village through marriage. The organization of marriage, like the organization of castes which results from it in part, is one of the most persistent of the elements of village society. Since all persons born into the village are considered to be connected by a fiction of common descent, and since most persons address each other—even across caste lines—by kinship terms appropriate to their generation in the scheme of common descent, a marriage between a boy and a girl of Kishan Garhi would constitute incest. The fiction of agnatic kinship is extended beyond the immediate village to include persons born into the six villages adjacent to Kishan Garhi, and no marriage is known ever to have occurred within this range. Only once in three generations is a marriage known to have occurred between Kishan Garhi and any of the eleven other villages



lying within a radius of two miles. The average distance of marriage is approximately twelve miles. The kin groups of Kishan Garhi today recognize marriage ties with more than three hundred villages on all sides; eighty of these other villages account for nearly half of all marriages. Each of the marriage-connected villages, like Kishan Garhi itself, is treated as a fictional agnatic unit.

Marriage in Kishan Garhi, strongly patrilocal as in most of northern India, is oriented to flow in a single direction only. The family and village to which one gives a daughter thereby becomes "respected" or "high"; the family and village from which one takes a wife thereby becomes "low". To a family standing in the "high" relationship to one's own, one gives gifts, deference and ceremonial service; from a family standing in the "low" relationship, one demands these things. Since the behaviour expected toward "high" and "low" relatives is contradictory, both kinds of relationship cannot be applied at once to the same other family and village. Additional marriages linking the same pair of villages and bringing or sending more women in the established direction are desired. But an exchange of a sister for a wife, or any other reversal of the direction of marriage between living groups is unthinkable.

Behind this organization of marriage is the feeling that one's daughter and sister at marriage become the helpless possession of an alien kinship group. To secure her good treatment, lavish hospitality must be offered and gifts made to her husband's family throughout life. The economic effects of this patterning of marriage are considerable. Not only are marriage and other ceremonial expenses thus kept high, but quantities of goods follow the women in later years by the same non-rational path. One quarter of all milk animals are obtained as gifts from marital relatives, and about one quarter of all debt is incurred to fulfil marriage demands. The persistence and vigour of such a structuring of marriage puts limits on the degree to which a village can manage its economic affairs as a local unit.

#### RANK AND PRESTIGE

By ritual criteria based on the handling of food and on the rendering and receiving of certain specialized services, all

twenty-four castes represented in Kishan Garhi are there placed with general agreement in five or six ranked blocs of castes. Villagers refer to these blocs from top to bottom as "highest" (Brahman), "the high castes" (Jāt, Bania, Kāyasth, Carpenter, Jogi, Māli, Kachi, Garāria, Dhimār, Nau), "the low castes" (Kumhār, Darzi, Karhera, Koli, Khatik), "Muslim" (Faqir, Manihār, Rangreza, Teli), "the very low castes" (Chamār, Dhobi) and "the lowest of all castes" (Bhangi, Kanjār). This ranking of castes in ritual blocs is reflected in much of inter-caste behavior—forms of greeting, arrangements for eating, smoking, sitting, etc. Within each major bloc, the ranking of separate castes must be estimated by villagers according to minor ritual criteria; estimates of precise rank within the blocs are not consistent or well agreed.

There has long been an approximate correspondence between the ranking of the blocs of castes in Kishan Garhi and the local distribution of power and wealth. Fifty years ago, however, the Jāt landlords, standing in the second bloc of ritual precedence, dominated the Brahmans in matters of land and political strength. Now the tables have been turned once more. But rising along with the Brahmans in secular affairs are a number of tenants of much lower caste. Whatever the temporary shifts of wealth and power as between the castes, the ritual forms that are significant for caste rank shift but slowly. Thus the tradition of a landlord's Darbar at Dasahra has fallen into disuse, yet rules governing the position of the Jāt caste in the local hierarchy of food and services remain much the same.

Much more responsive to economic and political changes are the positions of single persons in the hierarchy of individual prestige (*izzat*). In Kishan Garhi, a man's caste rank counts for little more than seven annas in the sum of his prestige; wealth and political affiliation together count for nine annas. Thus although nearly everyone in the village would agree that the caste of Brahmans is to be ranked at the top and the caste of Chamārs ranked far down toward the bottom, still most persons would rate certain well-to-do and respectable Chamārs as higher in individual prestige than certain pious and impecunious Brahmans.



At present there is intense competition for rank among castes and for prestige among individuals. Competition is currently intensified by the elimination of landlords as tax collectors and by the election of villagers to serve on the village committee (*gāon panchāyat*) and on the rural court (*panchayāti adālat*). The Brahman tenants, now superior to the old landlords in their land rights and in the aggregate of their possessions, are trying to organize their own effective dominance over the village. But to organize effective dominance is an entirely new problem for them. They constitute one-quarter of the population of Kishan Garhi and now control half of its lands. But they cannot agree on leadership, on who is to take precedence among them, or even on the idea that one person, or a small group of persons might speak impartially for all. By older techniques of organization, each man spoke for himself and for his own kin group, or else failed to speak and thereby showed his intention to withdraw from co-operation. The tenants and wealthier artisans of eight other castes in the village are trying to consolidate their economic gains by securing a ritually higher position in the caste hierarchy; they are helped in their efforts by older caste rank-raising movements outside the village. But most castes and clans cannot even agree to rise together, for they are as divided as are Brahmans by internal rivalries which represent intrusions of the economic situation with its recent changes. Several kinds of ritual services and requests for alms which were considered as the special duties and claims of some ten of the castes a generation ago are now tending to be dropped because they clearly imply an insufferable degree of subordination.

"To behave properly" and "to respect" are synonymous in village language. Older villagers look on the new disagreements about rank and prestige as evidence for a general loss of respectfulness, for a crumbling of all ordered relationships in their society. There is perhaps some truth in some villagers' idea that the ritual hierarchy of caste and order itself are identical, for the ritual hierarchy was, along with the segments forced by economic and political dependency, one of the few systems by which the multiple, sovereign and demanding kin groups of the village were fitted into some intelligible general

pattern. A more flexible general pattern of classes based on individual prestige could evolve only by further weakening both in ritual values and in the cohesiveness of the kinship groups which were the units of the older ritual hierarchy.

#### CONVIVIAL GROUPINGS

Regular friendly association among persons of different kinship groups in Kishan Garhi appears always to have been limited, except for certain mass activities, to association among a very few persons. Traditionally, most convivial groupings have been brought into being by ceremonial necessities. Small, limited and ritualized as they are, such convivial groupings are nevertheless numerous and important. Their diffuse patterns link together, however tenuously, persons of different caste rank and kinship group who are formally set apart.

Men and women live their associational lives in sharply separated spheres. This separation in itself promotes a greater diffusion in the contacts of each family, for the associations of husband and wife may take quite different directions. In the same way children, although admonished by adults as to their associates, rarely conform in their play groups to their parents' patterns either of formal groupings or of cliques.

Inhibiting the development of secondary associations in Kishan Garhi is the feeling that any strong, positive attachment outside of one's caste and kin group constitutes a potential threat to that group's primary demand for exclusive loyalty. When adults do associate themselves in cliques or friendships outside of the primary group limits, they usually do so secretly and sometimes deny that such an association exists. Pairs or groups of men who sit together frequently without formal reason and in defiance of differences of kinship, rank and power that may exist among them are likely to be regarded as fools or troublemakers. To be sure, one common reason for the existence of cross-kin and cross-rank associations is that there are serious troubles within the primary formal groups; splits within those groups require members to seek allies outside, if anywhere. As a result of strong disapproval, however, very few friendly secular associations do span great differences of social



status. There are no permanent voluntary associations other than a few cliques and friendships.

Ceremonial occasions provide many approved contexts for briefer convivial gatherings among persons of disparate formal affiliation. Family ceremonies, especially the ceremonies leading up to and following marriage, require the most intense and extensive participation beyond the bounds of kinship. On ten nights before each wedding, groups of from one to four dozen women gather without specific invitation to sing at the house of the betrothed. Wedding feasts and processions are joined by men only and only on invitation. Invitations are issued to conform with an explicit formula. This formula gives fullest participation and first claim to the nearest kinsmen and relatives by marriage, representative participation to other lineages of the same local caste group, smaller representative participation to other castes considered as whole, and individual participation to persons who have been one's hosts in the past, to non-kinsmen who have made token contributions to the wedding expenses, and to other individuals who are one's economic or political associates and servants. Any one of these categories of the formula may include persons from outside the village itself. But if participation is extended to any given category of persons, it must be extended consistently, for errors in inviting are taken as slights, and may be sternly reciprocated. Such a formula nevertheless allows some room for unstructured personal choice within each category. Feasts at the family ceremonies of naming new infants and memorializing the dead follow a similar formula, applied less extensively.

The festivals of the Hindu calendar, which occur in annual and monthly cycles, provide more frequent occasions for brief convivial gatherings and give still wider scope than do family ceremonies for inter-personal choice. Although no festival can be said to be wholly unconnected with family and kinship organization, still these ceremonies of the calendar are much less completely governed by formal categories of social structure. Primarily attended by male associates are sacred recitations and incendiary sacrifices conducted optionally at each darkening of the moon and in great numbers at Divali and Holi. From five to twenty kinsmen and associates may be

invited to attend one of these optional ceremonies; occasionally, a feast is added, which may attain the proportions of a marriage feast. Annually during the month before Holi and on a few other festival days, two or three small singing associations of men may gather informally. Primarily attended by women and children are the ceremonies of a dozen other annual festivals. These festivals are celebrated in nearly every household by small gatherings of neighbours, kinswomen and playmates. Freer, open participation occurs among about half of the younger men on a few annual days of competitive sports, and among most of the women of the village in one group at two annual days of songs. An annual propitiation of all godlings and an annual fair at one village shrine serve as occasions for mass participation by women and by all persons, respectively. Finally, the great yearly saturnalia of Holi allows three days of expressions of love and aggression, briefly overriding and overturning all the forms of ordinary social structure.

The many tiny and frail convivial gatherings on ceremonial occasions in Kishan Garhi maintain a minimal net-work of positive inter-group connections among people across the ordinary formal lines of economic, caste and kinship divisions. But at no time in the knowable past has there been any more comprehensive organization than that which they provide. There seems never to have been any form of associational behaviour which regarded the village as a unit in which all groups have a shared equity, or which looked on village problems as the problems of all. The disciplined followings of landlords and lenders had great strength and heterogeneous composition, but never organized the whole village. The informal councils of the several castes have only rarely had the assistance of non-members of the local caste group in arbitrating their private solutions. The informal council of the Brahman tenants, potentially the strongest of all associations, has stood only for itself and opposition to the landlords. Villagers voting in the recent election grouped themselves according to many and diffuse allegiances, took their choice among five sets of candidates of the local landlords' caste, and affirmed overwhelmingly that the party in power best represented the disparate interests of each group.



## PRESENT PROBLEMS

No one will perhaps be surprised if a village whose social relations are structured in the manner of Kishan Garhi's does not rapidly develop an active village committee (*gāon panchāyat*) or contribute to the building of an effective rural court (*panchayāti adālat*) as prescribed in the U. P. Panchayat Raj Act. The village committee that was officially acclaimed includes a fair sampling of members from many castes. But that committee never meets. The group that actually considers public issues and uses the powers granted by authority of the new Act is none other than the old informal local Brahman council, representing one-quarter of the people and a little more than half of the tenancy rights. The ex-landlords proudly abstain from participation in this body, manoeuvring as best they can through the remnants of their followings, or experimenting with alliances among the other disinherited persons. The Brahman council acting as village committee has been unable to establish trust sufficient to permit it to collect as much as one-half of its small committee tax, or to realize more than a fraction of the fines which it has levied during a period of nearly three years. It was able with great difficulty to collect enough straw to repair the roof of the two-room village school. It has been unable to carry through any of the three projects of village improvement which it haltingly undertook on the suggestion of its government-appointed secretary. It has achieved punishment of one petty misdemeanour within the Brahman caste, and of two minor crimes by lower persons against Brahmans. In all other cases there have been dissident opinions which led the committee to appeal to non-official coercive arbitration by the police or by a neighbouring landlord, or to refer the cases to due process of law in the regular courts.

The failure of the village committee to dispose of cases of conflict in the village does not mean that conflict has been in any way lessened. Since its official inception, the village committee has formally entered more than thirty cases—an average of a new case each month. Of these thirty, twenty-five have passed up to the rural court at Brij Garhi. Cases are often

trivial in origin; insults, threats and suspected plotting are common instigations for the filing of a suit, although the formal charge may be theft, beating or default of payment. The initiating fees and gifts are deceptively small. One vague issue quickly deviates and diffuses into other issues as additional members of the affected kin groups and their allies join in the case as "witnesses". Two or three officially unrelated cases are always in progress; not uncommonly all dissolve at once if crucial advantage on real issues is gained by one faction in the dispute. If the opposed faction can manage it, three new cases may be fabricated for entry on the next day. An average case runs for two months in the rural court. An average villager may spend a whole day of each month in litigation, throughout the year.

The rural court at Brij Garhi has superior jurisdiction over the village committee at Kishan Garhi and over four other village committee areas in the region. The delegates sent by Kishan Garhi to the rural court were elected just as were the village committees, by public show of hands confirming a panel of nominees which had been previously negotiated by the returning officer among the castes, lineages and factional groupings of the village. Almost all of the twenty-five members of the rural court are landlords. But the landlords' own hierarchy of dominance has been much disrupted of late, and they too, like the litigant tenants of Kishan Garhi, are torn by competition and aligned in shifting factions. Unable now to arbitrate conflicts single-handedly, these rustic magistrates do battle among themselves using litigants as pawns. Such a contentious court as theirs welcomes new litigation, but has little interest in achieving real composition of the cases which come before it. Its "dismissals" often simply represent delays and diversions of process into the higher courts; its inept "decisions" often simply provide the technical bases necessary for higher appeals. Still the ex-landlords have a smattering of the law and enough valuable higher connections, to guarantee their control of the rural court for some time to come. Tahsildars and Subdivisional Officers, deluged now with the new volume of litigation pouring in from the rural courts, are apt to regard their villagers as depraved or to look back longingly on the days



when there was at least one strong man in each village who could be depended upon to settle petty quarrels with a firm hand. The strong men of the past are the amateur advocates of the present.

Kishan Garhi's internal divisions are not entirely disadvantageous to governmental administration; indeed, factional splits are often temporarily useful to officials who might otherwise have to cope with united opposition against their official acts. The three major crimes of Kishan Garhi in recent years which fell to the police for investigation were all solved by the technique of widening factional divisions at promising points, and then extracting mutually incriminating information from each of the two opposed groups. The party leaders who had to assist the revenue officials in collecting landlord abolition payments and who had to get out the vote in the elections similarly made use of competition among Kishan Garhi's factions.

Were the national economy moving smoothly toward the goal of improved sustenance and a better rural life, then the problem of concerted action in villages like Kishan Garhi might not be thought acute. But some amount of concerted action is now required by intense and inequitable competition for static productive resources and static social goods. Most programmes for technical or economic development of rural India require that there be a modicum of local co-operation that disregards primary group affiliations. Officials at all levels recognize the fragmentation of village social structure as a chief obstacle in the way of any programme.

The low state of co-operation that presently prevails among the kin groups of Kishan Garhi and the structural features that determine it, suggest that greater concerted action will be achieved in the future only by a more severe unsettling of basic structures than has occurred in any age of the past. The energies of the kin groups are now devoted to securing their private prestige and prosperity, to advancing and fulfilling the claims of marriage. The inequities that once articulated the castes and lineages in work and subordinated them to one another in wealth and power are seeking a level. The ritual devices that set the castes in an agreed hierarchy of ranks are

now partly confounded. The kinship groupings themselves remain as so many sovereign states, loosely linked by a few work relationships, by a handful of friendships, and by the ceremonies of an ancient cycle. To ask the forty-six lineages of Kishan Garhi to continue to live by shifting alliances is to insure inaction or strife rather than co-operation. To entice them to delegate some of their loyalties for the work of the village as a whole is to lure the old social structure toward its sure destruction.



BISIPĀRA is 100 miles east of Cuttack and forty miles south of the Mahānadi river. It lies on the southern edge of an egg-shaped plain, which is two miles from east to west and a mile from north to south. The plain is 1,750 feet above sea-level and the hills around rise between 500 and 1,000 feet higher. The Sālki river runs from south to north through the plain and the village is built in a crook of land between the Sālki and a small tributary. Both these rivers have cut channels between ten and twenty feet deep. The Sālki is about eighty yards from bank to bank. The smaller stream, where it has not been controlled for paddy fields, is about ten yards wide.

The plain consists of jungle-covered mounds, in height about fifty feet. On one of these Bisipāra is built. To the west of the village, the stream is used to water paddy fields. A mile to the north a spring rises and gives water for a wide crescent-shaped belt of fields, which curl along the north-eastern side of the village. On the east side there are levelled "dry" paddy fields, irrigated only in the rains. The edges of the mounds, clearings on other mounds, and the sides of *nalas* are used for dry cultivation of crops other than rice.

The hills around are jungle-covered and infested by tigers and leopards. Bears make the forest paths dangerous. Cerebral malaria kills many children. The area has a reputation as a place "gloomy and pestilential".

#### HISTORY OF THE AREA

The hills have been occupied, since time unknown, by Kui-speaking peoples. The Rajas of the Oriya-speaking lowland states had control over nowhere but the foot-hills. This they achieved by sending warrior chiefs to found colonies. Many Oriya villages were established in this way. The relation of the colonies and the mother state is not clear; but we know

that the Hill Chiefs were rather Lords of the Marches, owing allegiance and often refusing it, than proconsuls administering a colony.

The men of Bisipāra came originally from Boad in the north, *via* another hill village, Bolscoopa. The ruling caste are sur-named Bisi, once a title of service under the Orissa kings. Genealogies indicate that they have been in Bisipāra for 200 years, but such evidence is approximate. However, at least we know that the Bisis were firmly established here one hundred years ago, and provided leaders against the soldiers of the East India Company.

Between 1840 and 1850 there were expeditions every year into the hills, based on Russelkonda in the south, to suppress the rite of human sacrifice. This was performed by the Kui and by the Oriya settlers. In 1850 a Tahsildār, one Dinabandu Pātnāik, an ex-policeman, began a regular administration from a headquarters which settled eventually at Bisipāra. At the end of twenty-five years he retired with the title of Rai Bahadur and the profits of an administration so conducted with systematic pillage and calculated ferocity that even today I have heard Kui men comment with satisfaction on the extinction of his lineage.

From 1850 onwards Oriyas came from the south to join those who had come many years before from the north. Bisipāra became the administrative capital. Policemen and revenue officials settled here. Dinabandu Tahsildār encouraged Brahmins to go into the hills, where land could always be found for them. He built a temple. A market was opened. Bisipāra continued to expand until in 1904, A. J. Ollenbach, then SDO, moved his headquarters to Phulbani. Now there are no officials in Bisipāra; the descendants of some remain; other families have gone to the new capital.

In these years, those who profited most were the Sundis, a caste whose traditional occupation was liquor-making. The story of the money-lender and the toddy-seller among the Ādibāsi is too familiar; but in this area action was taken as early as 1910 when all liquor shops were abolished. Again, in 1920, a land settlement of Oriya villages was made, and, imperfect though it is, it gives force to the law that



no one but an Ādibāsi may buy land, without special permission.

#### COMPOSITION OF THE VILLAGE

This history is reflected in the siting of the village houses. There are six streets: Kumhārsai, Sudosai, Panosai, Sundisai, Khodalsai, and Hatopodera, containing about 750 people.

The street of the potters, *Kumhārsai*, is built in the Kui fashion—two lines of houses, not detached, with gardens behind them. At each end of a Kui street there was usually a fence of tall stakes to protect the village at night from enemies and wild animals. The Kumhārs are officially Ādibāsi, and, although now their assimilation to Hinduism is almost complete, we may conjecture that they are the true Ādibāsis, the first occupants of the site. Their genealogies all indicate long residence. There are no longer any posts at the end of Kumhārsai and the houses have been rebuilt in Oriya fashion<sup>1</sup>, but the siting is typically Kui.

The Bisis and others whose ancestors were in the service of the Boad Raja, are by caste Sudos. Their street, *Sudosai*, is built of two parallel lines of continuous houses, demonstrating that they were sited in the days when there were wars and a greater need than now for protection against wild animals. Nowadays the Bisis live in the centre of the street. On the fringes are strangers who have come since 1850. They are: a Gauro (herdsman) schoolmaster, whose father came from the south as a constable; a Brahmin household and a Barber household; a Christian whose father was head clerk; a Gauro; and a Mahanti shopkeeper who arrived last year.

The street of the outcastes, *Panosai*, is set apart from the rest of the village. It, too, is sited in the Kui fashion. Genealogies indicate a similar origin and length of residence as the Sudos, and it is likely that the Panos came to the hills with the Sudos from the north.

<sup>1</sup> Kui houses are built of wide horizontal planks. Oriya houses are made from vertical planks, plastered over with mud. Both have a double roof: of mud, an air space, and then thatch.

*Sundisai* is built on the same plan, although the decline in its prosperity is shown by several gaps in the line, where houses have fallen in. Genealogies indicate that these Sundis arrived at about the same time as the Sudos and Panos.

These four streets, *Kumhārsai*, *Sudosai*, *Panosai*, and *Sundisai*, offer similar characteristics. The siting of the houses and the evidence of the genealogies show that these are old streets. Secondly, they have a clear majority of households of the eponymous caste.

It is not so in the other two streets, *Khodallasai*, and *Hatopodera*. All the inhabitants of *Hatopodera* are either immigrants or the sons of immigrants. Their houses are sited irregularly in several short streets and blocks; and the people are of different castes, Sundi and Kuli predominating, but including also Keuto, Brahmin and Gauro<sup>1</sup>. This, as the name implies, was the street of the market (now closed) and in every case the motive for immigration was either trade or work at the headquarters. *Khodallasai* is the name given to scattered houses on the west side of the village, where the government buildings, of which no trace now remains, were sited. There are two families of Panos who have come up from the south: a family of sweepers (Ghasi); a Brahmin house which has charge of the big temple founded by Dinabandu Tahsildār; and several Kui families who have come here within the last ten years in search of labouring work.

There are then, two categories of street: one old and—relatively—peopled by one caste; the other new, and, for political and economic reasons, heterogeneous.

#### ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES

It is not possible to say with certainty what was the pattern of economic life in Bisipāra before the 1850's. We know that there were no markets and it is said that each village was self-sufficient economically. If that is so, its income would be derived entirely from the land, and there would be a limited exchange between cultivators and those who practised a

<sup>1</sup> The Sundis are by tradition, toddy-drawers; the Kulis, weavers; the Keuto, fishermen; and the Gauro, herdsmen.



traditional occupation—barbering, oil-pressing, etc.—in addition to working on their land. The same goods were produced and consumed within the village. There was, so to say, no foreign trade.

After 1850, some of the village income, in the form of taxes, was expended outside the village. A portion of this was returned as salaries and government expenditure, and consumed within the village. Money circulated more freely and the cultivator exchanged a portion of his crop with the new class of specialists—policemen, peons, etc.—in return for money, which he used to pay his taxes and to satisfy new needs for manufactures. A market was founded. Shops were established, and, by trade with the surrounding Kui villages, Bisipāra began to derive some of its income from outside. In other words, since 1850 Bisipāra has been integrated into a larger economic structure, getting income from other villages, and spending on goods and services which came from outside.

The inhabitants of the four old streets, Sudosai, Kumhārsai, Panosai and Sundisai tend to be the producers of primary goods, while those who live in Hatopodera and Khodallasai are either manufacturers or middlemen. Thus, four of the five shops in Bisipāra are situated in Hatopodera. One Gauro was a trader, another makes and sells snuff. Three of the Kulis make and sell cloth. The Keuto makes *chura*, a product of rice, and exchanges it with Kui people for paddy. In Khodallasai the Panos are carters, and the Kui are either farm labourers or basket-makers.

However, this economic difference between the old and the new streets is beginning to disappear. On the one hand, those who profited as manufacturers or middlemen—particularly the Sundi shopkeepers—invested their money in land, which they work by share-cropping or with hired labour. On the other hand, when a land-owning family multiplies and land is not sufficient, a man may go in for trading in the Kui villages. With his own money, or money borrowed from a *mahājan* in Phulbani, the district headquarters, he buys turmeric and mustard and other crops, and sells them in the market at Phulbani or to the *mahājan*. His wife might make *mudi* (parched rice), or buy dried fish and salt, and trade these around the

villages. The proportion of households which regularly derive a larger or a smaller part of their income from sources other than the products of their own land is 91 per cent.

The position nowadays of the village in the larger economic structure is this: Bisipāra imports cloth, tea, sugar, salt, metal goods, kerosene, some vegetables, and the services it gets in return for paying taxes; it exports a small quantity of paddy; some manufactured goods, mostly from its looms; and the services of those who go to work as policemen, schoolmasters, or peons away from, or within, the village; and it re-exports turmeric, mustard seed and other crops grown in Kui villages.

#### VILLAGE UNITY

From several points of view the population of the village is heterogeneous. Some are new-comers; some have been here for generations. Some are Ādibāsis; some are Oriyas. Of the Ādibāsis, some have Oriya as their main language and have forgotten Kui; others know Oriya and use it when they must, but in their homes speak Kui. Some Oriyas have come from the north; others from the south. There are high castes, low castes, outcastes, and some Ādibāsi families altogether outside the caste system. There are craftsmen, middlemen and cultivators. Traders and shopkeepers compete both with one another and with their customers. There are rich and poor.

However, in spite of diverse origins, occupations, languages and interests, the population of the village can be a unity. For example, in the middle of October it was discovered that the ripening paddy was being eaten by an insect. This bug, *Lepto Corissa SPP*, is not uncommon in Orissa; but this was the first time in living memory that it had attacked the village crops. The village headman sent a report to the Agricultural Department. The people of the village decided to hold a *rugō bolani*—a ceremony to avert the disaster. This ritual was conducted by a *gunia*, an Ādibāsi Kumhār. It was done in the Hindu fashion with offerings of rice, coconuts, ghee and mango leaves. No animal was sacrificed, as is the Kui custom. The *gunia* was closely assisted by a Sundi, by the Sudo headman, and by another Kumhār. Music was provided by a man of the sweeper



caste (Ghasi) and three Panos. To the cost of the ceremony every house except the Christian contributed each two pice.

Again, at this time of the year, when occasional showers of rain leave the ground soft enough to show tracks, the village goes hunting. Five guns take part, four belonging to the Sudos, and the fifth lent by the Christian. Any man who can spare the time goes out as a beater. On the hunt, men of all castes, clean and unclean, rub shoulders freely; but on the return path, if it should lead near to the outcaste street, Panosai, the high caste Sudos will make a wide detour.

A third example of how the village functions as a unity in certain contexts is provided by the Brahmin who got above himself. There are two temples in the village, in each of which a daily *thākur puja* is performed. One old Sudo also has a *thākur puja* done each day in his house. The Brahmin family, who officiate at the big temple, received from the grandfather of the present headman the gift of two fields. Another Brahmin family officiated both in the old man's house and in the village temple. About a year ago, this Brahmin demanded four fields, two from the old man and two from the village. The old man gave the fields. The village held a meeting and refused, saying that he must be content with the paddy which each house paid him for making the *puja*. Thereupon he went on strike and refused to make the *puja*. The village held another meeting; they appointed the third Brahmin family to do the *thākur puja*; and they withdrew from the offender, not only his *thākur* payment, but also other "insurance" payments which each household made yearly in return for his help at deaths and other ceremonies. They still speak to him; but no one will employ him as a priest.

The factors which underline such unified actions are these. Firstly, the majority of the villagers have a common background. They have grown up with one another and have a common experience which goes back for generations. This is an imponderable factor, but nonetheless real. Secondly, they have a common interest in their economic life. Everyone's fields were attacked by the bug. Traders are rivals, but they have a common concern to such topics as the price turmeric is fetching, and in the fact that a rich and enterprising Kui man

has now begun to market his own turmeric and mustard seed. Thirdly, there is a great multiplicity of ties between persons. For an example, take the son of the headman. He is nineteen; he left school last year. Having been away in Phulbani at school for the last ten years, he is less integrated than other youths of his age. He is an Oriya, a Sudo descended from those Hill Chiefs who came from Boad. He is a member of a large and influential family. In other contexts he is a man of the Sudo caste. If a visitor comes from Gochapara, he is one of a group in this village who owe them hospitality, since his mother came from Gochapara. He has obligations to help and rights to be helped by a small category of individuals whose fathers or mothers pledged ritual friendship with his father or mother. He is especially friendly with four or five young men of his own age, who attended the local school when he did. They are all of different castes. He can read and write, and knows some English, and so is one of those who get together to write petitions or keep accounts when the village feels it is necessary. In this way we may look upon him—and almost every other person in the village—as a link between groups otherwise not connected.

Next to the house of this Sudo boy, there lives a widow and her son. Between these two are the following links: they are of the same caste; she is his classificatory aunt, since her husband was a classificatory elder brother of the boy's father; her daughter has married a man of the village, so that she is also his classificatory mother-in-law and her son is his brother-in-law; the widow is a poor woman and she regularly earns paddy by helping the boy's mother with the threshing; the widow's son and the boy's younger brother are in the same class at school; when he is not at school, the widow's son works as a servant for the boy's uncle. These are only a few of the situations in which these two individuals interact, either directly or indirectly. By tracing out the links between the relatives and friends of the boy and the relatives and friends of the widow, the list could be multiplied almost indefinitely. This case is typical.

The village unity is a rope of many strands. When the village decided to discipline their Brahmin, he was not



supported, as one might expect, by his fellow Brahmins. They were tied into the village in too many ways. The metaphor appropriately suggests that he was unable, by pulling on the one strand of caste, to break the whole rope.

#### THE FUTURE

I do not suggest that the village is a utopia of perfect integration. It is a village axiom that the poor are helpless against the rich. Up to the present day, the majority of the rich are tied into the village in the manner I have described above. But one wealthy man, who has fields here and a prosperous business in Phulbani, has for years defied the canons of good behaviour. In particular he is said to have cheated several people in land transactions. The *Panchāyat* is powerless. One victim won a case against him, but the rest are too poor or too ignorant to go to law. He is rich enough not to depend on friends and relatives for help at harvest or transplanting time, and when sickness comes.

The point is not only that this man is without a social conscience, but also that he has interests outside the village. Thus he is less dependent on his fellow villagers than are other men in Bisipāra. This suggests that the more the village becomes integrated in the larger economy, by the private enterprise of men like this, the less of a unity it becomes.

There are schemes for development in this area. How far they will cause Bisipāra to become part of economic India, remains to be seen.

I

THE topic selected for study is not merely of local interest but manifests itself in other regions of India and, to a greater or lesser extent, in all parts of the world. The general problem is the impact of mercantilism on an agricultural near-to-subsistence economy: What happens when the village is made part of the larger economy of the country and ultimately of the world? How is the village initiated into this larger system? What conflicts arise and how is the internal structure of the village modified by them?

The problem is analyzed with reference to the caste system of a village in the hills of Orissa. The region is peculiarly suited for this purpose since it is geographically and historically demarcated.

II

In the earliest records, that area of wooded mountainous country, the northern part of which today is called the Kondmals, appears as a no-man's-land between the lowland Hindu states of Boad in the north and Gumsur (Ganjām) in the south. The inhabitants of these states were Oriyas. In the highland lived Konds, a non-Hindu aboriginal tribe. Typical of traditions about those days is the story of the Raja of Boad who with a large army crossed the mountains and after a long war wrested the sacred image of Mahāsinghi from the Raja of Kimedya, a southern neighbour of Gumsur. This image he set up at Bolscoopa, where it now rests, at the north-eastern limit of the hills above the plains of Boad. The Konds do not appear in the story.

The settlement at Bolscoopa was a forerunner of other Oriya colonies which spread across the region from the north-east. The first British account of the hills insists that these were in



fact military outposts designed to protect the plains of Boad from Kond raiders, but local tradition speaks also of population pressure and faction fighting.

The immigration was opposed by the Konds. There are traditions of warfare. Villages are laid out as in a hostile environment. Our knowledge is too thin to describe fully subsequent relations between Kond and Oriya. They lived always in separate villages. There has been inter-marriage, although not extensively since such marriages offend the rules of caste. It is also clear from records and tradition that Oriyas were fully committed in the Kond ritual of human sacrifice. Even today many rites in an Oriya village are in essence Kond rites. As for political power, by the time the British armies arrived in the 1830s, Oriyas appear to have been able to answer for the Konds. The tenacious fight against the British was led by men with Oriya names. Whether this represents a real hegemony, or whether it is the result of the servants of the East India Company being able to speak Oriya and not the Kond language, is not clear.

Once a regular administration was established about 1850, this happy accident of speaking the same language as the administrator has established the Oriyas in a position of authority over the Konds, which today is scarcely touched in spite of more than thirty years of protective and discriminating legislation on behalf of the Konds.

### III

When the village in which I lived (and which is in the centre of the Kondmals) first was colonized by the Boad Oriyas—perhaps about three hundred years ago—there were seven castes present. The main part of this invading group consisted of the Warrior caste. They brought with them specialist castes, the Brahmin, Barber, Herdsman, Distiller and Outcastes. These people either followed their traditional occupations (the Outcastes were musicians) or worked as farm servants and clients for the Warriors.

The first servants of the East India Company emphasize the total absence of markets and other trading institutions. The

village was a self-contained agricultural unit. The Warriors owned the land and combined soldiering with farm management. Outcastes were their servants (the word used is *proja*, which also can be used to mean the subject of a *raja*). The other castes followed their traditional occupations. Wealth was derived from land and land was monopolized by the Warriors. The other castes—including the Brahmin—were in a position of economic dependence, political subordination and, apart perhaps from the Outcastes, numerical inferiority.

The picture is essentially correct, so far as the evidence goes, but it is as well to indicate the range of error. The list of occupational castes may be incomplete. For example there is no history of an Oriya Potter caste having lived in the village. There may have been one. Or the village might always, as it does now, have relied on the potters of a neighbouring community. Secondly, the occupational castes, in particular the Brahmin, might by the accident of personality have produced a man with the qualities of leadership, who might temporarily have modified the position of political subordination in which his caste is now placed towards the Warriors. These possibilities are not excluded, although there is no evidence for them. But as a general statement of relations between castes, the dominance of the Warriors is not to be doubted.

#### IV

From about 1850 until 1900 the village was the headquarters of the administration. The early *tahsildārs* actively encouraged immigrants, particularly Brahmins, but men of many other castes came on their own initiative to exploit the new economic opportunities. Unlike the first Oriyas who had come from Boad in the north, the home of the great majority of those who came after 1850 is in Ganjām in the south. Although the newcomers spoke the same language as the original settlers, they differed in caste, place of origin, and economic skills. Today the descendents of the Boad Oriyas are 57 per cent of the village population of 685 persons; the Ganjām Oriyas and a group of aborigines are 43 per cent.

Formerly land was the single source of wealth. Since 1859 there has grown up an extensive trade in primary products,



particularly turmeric and *mohua* (*bassia latifolia*), and a demand for such manufactures as machine-cloth, kerosene, tea, sugar and so on. Until 1920 there was a very profitable trade in alcoholic drink. At the present day there are increasing numbers of people drawing salaries as school masters, messengers, watchmen, headmen and policemen. As wealth has been accumulated through these mercantile sources, it has tended to be invested in land. Since the environment sets a limit on the amount of land that can be brought under cultivation, and this limit was reached before 1850, someone had to lose land. The land in fact has been transferred and still is moving from the cultivators to those who have another source of income. Originally this movement must have been from the Boad settlers to the Ganjām settlers. But more recently it has become a redistribution, irrespective of origin, away from those whose wealth lies in land to those who can exploit other economic opportunities.

## v

The mechanics of this process can be observed today, for there is still a slow but steady movement of land away from the Warrior caste. The problem of why a peasant should sell his land is seldom explicitly formulated and some writers are content to speak of his inability to understand the significance of the rates of interest on the one hand, and on the other hand much is made of the chicanery of the money-lender. These no doubt are contributory factors, but whatever be the case in other regions, in the Kondmals, land comes into the market through the combined action of the system of inheritance and the pattern of consumption enjoined at certain crises of life.

There are many peasants whose income is such that they can meet the cost of social or economic contingencies—a marriage or a death or even the purchase of an ox—only by realising capital, by selling land. Most of the land which enters the market comes from persons in this income category.

Marrying a daughter is the most expensive rite, since a dowry has to be provided. The cost of marrying a son and of providing the mortuary rites for a relative are incurred not so

much in the rites themselves but in the obligatory feasting which follows. There is a great variation in the amounts spent on these three types of rites. The upper limit is set only by the extent of the rich man's desire to make a display. But at the other end of the scale there is a limit below which few poor men care to drop if they can avoid it by realising capital.

Purely economic crises—the most common of which is the loss of an ox—tend to cost less than contingencies arising from social obligations. There is, in fact, a descending spiral: estate *A* will sell a field to meet the cost of a wedding, but could buy an ox out of surplus income: estate *B* will lose a field to replace plough cattle, but the owner seldom needs to borrow paddy: estate *C* can borrow paddy, because the lenders think it will remain solvent: but the owner of estate *D* is selling fields in order to buy food for everyday needs. When a man is selling fields to feed himself, his career as a landowner is close to the end.

This is not a description of the decline of any actual estate, but of the working of an economic model. In terms of this model anyone who is forced to sell land to meet the cost of any type of contingency is on a descending spiral from which there is no escape. Each sale decreases the yield from his estate and makes him progressively more vulnerable to less expensive contingencies. In reality there are many other variables which can halt or accelerate the disintegration of an estate when it is at the margin of selling land to meet contingent costs.

One important factor is the amount of capital a man possesses in forms other than land—usually gold and silver ornaments. It is important because he is able to raise cash on these and so avoid selling land. Ornaments are a common investment, not only because they add to a man's prestige and because his womenfolk put pressure on him, but also because cash savings depreciate and are too liquid in form. A hoard of rupees gets frittered away in ones and twos: but selling or pledging a piece of gold is an act which requires careful forethought. It also is a form of saving against the day when the daughters marry. The second source of ornaments is the dowry which a wife brings, and although in law these belong to the wife and after her to the child she bears, in practice men make themselves free



to sell or pledge their wives' ornaments from the moment she arrives.

One way of realising the ornament is to sell it. This has several advantages over selling land. Jewellery can be sold to raise quite small sums, while the smallest unit of land a man can sell is his smallest field and this might be worth far more than he needs. Secondly, there is a regular market for jewellery and the price is adjusted according to the metal and the weight, so that a man knows roughly how much he should get for any piece. But there are no market prices for land and it is not uncommon to find a field sold for less than the value of a year's income from it. Thirdly, the market for jewellery is much wider than the market for land. Only a man's fellow villagers will buy land from him. They know his predicament and the market is a ruthless buyers' market. But the market for jewellery is wider. Fourthly—and most important—ornaments are a non-productive form of capital, so that their sale does not decrease the annual income of the seller. One of the burdens of selling land is that it aggravates the problem it seeks to solve—the sale arises from a shortage of income and every sale makes income smaller.

Ornaments, however, have a sentimental value and pressure from the womenfolk often causes a man to pledge rather than to sell them. This cancels out the fourth advantage, since interest rates seldom fall below 25 per cent per annum. It is interesting to note that loans are never made without security and the security demanded is invariably much higher than the sum lent. A typical transaction was a gold necklace worth Rs. 120 given as security for a loan of Rs. 80 at an interest of 25 per cent per annum. This procedure has served as a mechanism to prevent that "debt-enslavement" the classic description of which is in Darling's "The Punjab Peasant in Prosperity and Debt". For as soon as the lender doubts the chance of getting further interest payments, he confiscates the security and the transaction is at an end. There seems to be no attempt to prolong the relationship, increase the principal and so draw more profit from the interest.

A man can draw to some extent on ties of kinship to help him through economic crises, and so avoid selling land, but his

rights are circumscribed. The most costly contingencies are those arising at a marriage or a death. In these the role of relatives of all kinds is prescribed and they make prescribed gifts. But the value of the gifts is trifling beside the total cost of the ceremony. I have never heard of a man going to a relative and asking for money specifically to meet the costs of one of these rites. It is as if these are ritual occasions and it is not done to take notice of their financial significance. For purely economic crises—again the loss of an ox is the most common—it is not unusual for a man to get an interest-free loan from his mother's or his wife's family. He does not have the same freedom to approach his agnates. The reason for this is not clear, but it may result from the potential rivalry of agnates as heirs to lineage land and in particular to their father's land. (Partition is normal at the death of the father.) "Brothers are enemies", says the proverb, and the attitude to a brother's economic difficulties seems to be summed up in the statement, "He had the same chances as me. Let him look after himself."

The most important variable point taken into account in the working of the economic model is the ability of a man to make money outside the system of landowning. There is a great range of opportunity. Besides such directly agricultural activities as working on the land of another man, there are extensive systems of trading ranging from merchant-shopkeepers to old people who make a paltry living by hawking salt and parched rice around Kond villages. There is a seasonal trade in turmeric and *mohua*. There is casual labour to be found with contractors and the Government. There are salaried occupations with the Government. There are paddy-lenders, craftsmen and ritual or medical specialists. There is scarcely a landowner who does not have some second string to his bow. It is these secondary sources of income which put a break on the loss of land. For if these new economic opportunities were restricted to a few, given present conditions, land soon would be concentrated in their hands. As things work out the peasant not only can stay the rot in his estate but frequently can recover lost land. The drift of land is away from the Warriors. But it would be a much swifter movement if the Warriors too were not able to exploit the changed economic environment.



The amount of land that comes into the market is the result of many factors: a good or a bad harvest; the length of time between the crises afflicting landowners; their possession of other forms of capital; their chances of getting help from kinsmen; their income from sources other than land; and the size of their estates.

## VI

Other things being equal, a big estate is better able to withstand the crises which I have described above than is a smaller one. This being so, it might seem that all estates below a certain level should go out of existence and the big estates should get bigger. The phenomenon would be similar to changes in the economic world resulting from economies of scale—the large multiple stores driving small shops out of business. In fact there are certain mechanisms which prevent this tendency in the transfer of village lands. On the one side the chance of making money through commerce or salaries, which almost everyone enjoys to a greater or lesser extent, prevents much land from coming into the market. It also enables small landowners to buy land. On the other side there is a positive mechanism at work to break down large estates.

This mechanism is the system of inheritance. It is exceptional for two adult married men, related even as closely as brothers, to hold land in common. The classical joint family, holding all lands in common and managing the estate through its senior members, is never encountered. The institution of joint land-holding is known, however, and a few families keep a part of their land under this form of tenure, particularly if the fields are sited in a distant village and worked by share-croppers.

The division of land at the death of the father is important for the problem of the sale of land, since by it we can explain how estates come down to that size where owner is compelled to sell fields. The continuing existence of an estate at a given size depends on the accident of there being one heir. The chance of this happening over two or three generations is very small, especially in an expanding population.

Of the five men whose estates bring them more than 150 units of paddy (the average for all estates is about 50 units) four were the only heir and the other so manipulated things that he was in effect the sole heir.

This manipulation is significant in showing that estate owners are conscious of the effect of multiple inheritance and of the relation of wealth to power. The lineage in question provides the headman of the village and district. The last headman had five sons. He gave to each of the four younger ones an estate just large enough for them to live from; the eldest brother took the rest, getting an estate at least five times as large as those of his brothers. Another rich man plans to educate three of his sons and find them salaried positions. The fourth, who failed at school, will take all the land. The father plans to make a will to this effect. But devices like this are, as yet, exceptional. Without resorting to such means, there is no rich man in the village who could leave behind him four rich sons.

## VII

There are, of course, other ways in which land enters the market. Spectacular ruin has come to a few rich men through litigation or speculation or ritual misfortunes. But these are exceptional events. The common process is subdivision of land at inheritance, and the reduction in size of estates to the point where unless fields are sold they cannot meet the costs of those crises which occur in everyone's life-time.

This is the mechanism which brings land into the market today. I think that essentially the same process has been going on for the past hundred years. From time to time details—particularly economic details—have differed. Until 1920 the liquor trade was a principal source of wealth; in recent years increasing sums have been earned by working for a contractor who collects jungle leaves for the outer wrapping of cigarettes; there has been a steady decrease in the perquisites of headmen; and so on. But throughout the period the significant character is the peasant who cannot make ends meet unless he has a second source of income.



## VIII

The tendency in this transfer of land was for the Warriors to lose. They now possess 28 per cent of all the cultivated land in the village. Sometimes wealth went to individuals; at other times whole castes were enriched.

The history of the two Distiller castes illustrates the way in which wealth was transferred, and how the transfer upsets the existing social arrangements. The Boad Distillers came about the time the village was founded and there is no evidence that before 1850 they made great profits. It seems unlikely that they could have done so. The Warrior caste does not take liquor. The customers could have been only Konds and Out-castes, who were capable of making their own liquor.

Some time after 1850 factory liquor came into the area. Both the Boad Distillers and the Ganjām Distillers, who had arrived by now, opened liquor shops and made immense profits. They bought lands in the village and some acquired extensive estates in Kond villages. Then, after many years of official debate, prohibition was introduced in 1920 and the liquor shops were closed.

Since that time the Boad Distillers have lived as farmers and small traders. Their average wealth in land is about the same as that of the Warrior caste, and they now make a living in much the same way. But as dealers in alcohol their status was very low. So, since 1920, they have made strenuous and successful efforts to raise their standing. They do not touch alcohol. Their council forbids eating meat or fish. (In fact everyone in the village eats meat when they can get it, including the Brahmins.) They will accept neither food nor water from the hand of any caste but the Brahmin, although the Brahmins themselves accept water from the Warriors and Herdsmen.

After 1920 the Ganjām Distillers continued in commerce. Three of the five shops in the village are owned and managed by them. Their average income from land is approximately four times that of the Warrior average, making them much the richest caste in the village. In spite of this, although they consider themselves high in the caste hierarchy, they have imposed no restrictions on themselves and made no parade of their virtues

like the Boad Distillers. Only one of their number attends the village council, but not regularly. They contribute readily to village festivals and pay for their share of public works—such as repairing irrigation channels. But in fact they are strangers in the village, although all but one were born there. When there is a dispute they will go to the Government court sooner than defer to the village council. Their kinsmen are on the plains and they go visiting frequently. Their wives come from the plains. The village values the shops as a convenience and a source of revenue. The shopkeepers appreciate the village as a source of labour and custom. The relation is one of guarded respect. None of the present-day Ganjām Distillers are using their wealth to acquire a following and political influence within the village, nor so far as I know did their fathers.

The adjustment which the Boad Distillers have made to their new economic status is quite different from the adjustment made by the Ganjām Distillers. The Boad men have found recognition of a new economic status by rising *within* the caste and political systems of the village. They have neither rebelled and sought to place themselves at the head of the system nor have they staged a revolution and tried to overthrow the system. They have acquired power commensurate with their wealth by using constitutional means, so to speak. The Ganjām Distillers, on the other hand, use their wealth to remain *outside* the political system of the village. They can do this because the village no longer is the ultimate political authority, and they are sufficiently rich and educated and confident to represent themselves successfully before the higher authority, the Government courts.

Why has there been this different adjustment? One obvious reason is that the Boad Distillers had put down deeper roots in the village. The men from Ganjām still had ties with the plains. The men from Boad had none. Secondly, the Boad Distillers were not sufficiently rich to separate themselves from the village by regular appeal to the Government courts. It is significant that the one man among them who is as wealthy as the Ganjām Distillers—he is a building contractor—has moved from the village and no longer plays a part in village management, although he still owns land near the village.



## IX

These two adjustments are complete. The relations of the Warrior caste and the rest of the village with the two Distiller castes have reached a point of equilibrium. The struggle now is taking place between the village and the Boad Outcastes.

There is ample evidence that in the original village the status of the Outcastes was a very lowly one. They were clients and servants to individual Warrior households. In the village their traditional occupation was music-making. The Outcaste group has its own traditions and heroes in the distant days of warfare with the Konds, but the tale they tell of their economic status admits and even emphasizes their low standing. They laboured on the lands of others. But of their own they had no land, they say, since they would never have known how to manage it. Then—so they say—after the turn of the century the Administration began to take an interest in them and slowly they have learnt to manage land and to earn a living in other ways.

Their relations as persons to the Warriors and other "clean" castes of the village are still governed by the fact that their touch pollutes. They may not sit on the verandah of a "clean" house. They cup their hands to receive things dropped into them, so that there shall be no risk of pollution by touch. But for all this the relationship between individuals in the two groups does not seem unfriendly. It is a common sight to see two or three Outcaste men squatting in the street of the Warriors gossiping with the householders. Two instances of clientship survive. There are as well more casual economic relationships between Warrior and Boad Outcaste households. At harvest time and the time of transplanting many Outcastes work on Warrior farms as casual labourers. A few engage for the whole season as *holya* (farm servants). But all these relationships, except the client, are casual and changing and never grow beyond the purely economic bond.

The Boad Outcastes attend festivals and may make offerings at village temples, but they do not go inside. They are free to enter all other public places in the village.

Numerically their group is a third again as large as the group of Warriors, but their average income from land is about half that of the Warriors.

This is the social background against which the present conflict is taking place. Following is a description of some of the incidents which seem to me to be symptomatic of this conflict.

Formerly the Boad Outcastes were the official music-makers of the village. After playing in a festival it was their custom to go round the village houses and ask for gifts. They would be given food or small sums of money. There are also occasions during the year when all specialist castes, from the Brahmin down to the Sweeper, are entitled to beg from each house. The Boad Outcastes for the last five years have been denied this privilege. Music is provided by the Ganjām Outcastes and the village council has decreed that any household which gives to Boad Outcastes on occasions when giving is enjoined, will be fined Rs. 25. The village council says that they have done this because they could no longer afford to give to Boad Outcastes, since the entire street used to come begging. This is true but it is not in itself sufficient reason for the step the village council took. If that were the only or the real objection, the logical decision would have been to forbid giving to any but the musicians or to ask the Outcastes to nominate representatives to collect the gifts on behalf of their street. It seems more likely that the decree was punitive and arose out of the following incident.

When news of the Temple Entry movement reached the village, the Boad Outcastes came in a body to the big temple and demanded admission. The temple, although sited by the village and cared for by men of the village, was built to serve the whole Kondmals. The demand was refused by the Warriors. The Boad Outcastes then sent for the police. An official came and endeavoured to soothe the angry men, but the Warriors insisted that Outcastes could be admitted only after the whole Kondmals had been consulted. The incident ended there. No consultation was made. The Outcastes have never renewed their demand. Instead they have built a similar temple in their own street and observe similar rituals.

About the same time they began to try to improve their status. They announced that from then onwards they would



be called not Outcastes but Harijans. They decided to give up drink, meat and fish, and no longer to trade in cattle hides. They no longer touch dead cattle nor eat beef, but most of them transgress the other rules.

The householders leading this movement are rich. One is a policeman. Five are schoolmasters. Within this group there are two factions: one rigorously observes the restrictions laid down for themselves and is regarded with grudging respect by the Warriors; the other group seems to think that the barrier of untouchability is an insuperable obstacle and favours more direct methods. They are the leaders in the incident described below.

A Warrior youth was returning from fishing in the paddy fields. On a high narrow pathway he met an elderly Outcaste man coming home from market. The man is said to have pushed the boy down into the field. The boy came home covered in mud and crying. When he reached the first street of the village—that of the Boad Distillers—a man asked him what had happened and then sounded the alarm. Everyone came running and then went after the Outcaste who had fled to his own street.

The village council met and sent a message to the Outcaste telling him to come before the meeting and give his version of the affair. It was already evening and the Outcaste replied that he would come next morning.

But in the night the Outcastes went to the headquarters and asked for the protection of the police. The following day they intercepted a Minister from Cuttack who happened to be touring in the area and presented a petition. The police came as arbiters and dismissed the case. The Outcastes appealed to the Magistrate and the appeal was still pending when I left the area.

Throughout the last incident, which I witnessed, the Outcastes who worked on Warrior farms continued to come to the street of the Warriors and I saw other Boad Outcastes passing through the street on their way to the shops. Only those who were reputed to be the inspirers of the move to call in outside authority kept away. It was very noticeable that the business of serving relationship between castes could be carried on without apparent friction between individuals.

Equally noticeable are the separatist tendencies. On two occasions Outcastes called in outside authority, since in the village council their opponents were both plaintiff and judge. In so doing they denied the jurisdiction of the village court over themselves and implicitly denied their membership of the village. When refused access to the temple, they built one for themselves. They are acquiring the characteristics of a separate political entity. There are even the first signs of a caste hierarchy developing within themselves, at the top of which is that group which initiated and is observing the new restrictions, and which in fact is a group of wealthy men.

If it were not for the impassable barrier of untouchability, the Boad Outcastes might have found the same solution as the Boad Distillers. They might have risen within the caste hierarchy of the village. Denied this possibility they seek to assert themselves by an act of separation and the creation of a separate system. Like the Ganjām Distillers they are now outside the village, but not by their own choice. Pollution has forced them out.

It might be argued that this attempt of the Outcastes to improve their status is common to the whole of India and arises here not from local economic conditions but from propaganda and legislative encouragement. This is undoubtedly a valid argument. But it would be more accurate to say that legislation has moved the Outcastes to act only because economic conditions are appropriate. The movement to help Outcastes, with the great figure of Gandhi in the background, has dignified the struggle and obscured the fact that this fundamentally is an attempt by men economically qualified for power to achieve social recognition of that power and an environment in which they can exercise it.

Supporting this hypothesis is the fact that the Ganjām Outcastes, who all but one are poor men, side with the group of clean castes in the struggle against the Boad Outcastes.

X

What does the history of this village tell us about the effect of economic change on caste as an institution?



In the original village the relationship between castes was not simply one of ritual practice; the division of wealth and political power followed the same lines as caste division. Except for the single family of Brahmins, the Warriors were at the head of the caste ritual hierarchy: they were the wealthy class in the village; and they had the political power. Caste, in short, functioned as a political system.

Then the ultimate seat of political power moved outside the village. At the same time redistribution of wealth upset the political structure inside the village. Divisions of wealth no longer followed the same lines as caste division. A readjustment was inevitable, for, to put it simply, rich men do not like being snubbed.

One caste of newly-rich reacted in the classical manner and improved their status within the existing caste hierarchy. In other words, there was an internal reshuffle of positions, but the caste system continued to order political relations between the groups concerned and to reflect their economic status.

But in the other two examples caste does not perform this function. The political relationship of the Warriors to the Ganjām Distillers does not depend on their positions in a caste hierarchy. It is worked out in the Government courts. The political relationship of the Warriors and the Boad Outcastes is going the same way. Under pressure of economic change the political functions of caste are being taken over, as one might expect, by the ultimate political authority, the Government of India.

*Alan R. Beals*

## **Change in the Leadership of a Mysore Village\***

HATTARAHALLI is a village of average size (population 620) about fifteen miles from a large city in Southern India. For seventy years or more, it has been affected by urban influences reaching out from the city. Schools, courts of law, cinemas, hotels, military camps, railroads, buses, and motor lorries have brought about changes in almost every aspect of life. To the people of Hattarahalli, the most important of these changes are in the caste and character of those who control the social and economic life of the village.

In 1890, Hattarahalli was a small village of about three hundred persons. It was dominated by five families whose rule was based on principles of gerontocracy, inherited privilege, and economic power. In 1952, while age, heredity, and wealth continued to be important in determining a man's social position, the dominant class in the village was a middle class group of educated small businessmen, farmers, teachers and factory workers. This group, which had been educated in schools where English and Gandhian ideals of democracy and social equality were taught, placed little faith in traditional ideals of caste and social stratification. Their desire was to direct the course of village development in accordance with their new urban ideals. Perfect democracy had not "arrived" at Hattarahalli in 1952, nor was the caste system dead; but there was a movement away from traditional authoritarianism and social hierarchy, a movement opposed by those individuals who stood to profit from a return to the old way of doing things.

In a year of drought and unrest, such as 1952, the struggle between conservative and progressive elements for the control

\* A fictitious name has been given to the village for obvious reasons. The names of the castes given are those ordinarily used. Most castes, however, have alternate honorific names; thus, the Kuruba prefers to be referred to as Hālumatha, the Lingāyat as Shivabhakthru and the Mādiga as Ādi kārnatikas or Harijans.—*Ed.*



of village affairs became increasingly violent. The Patel of the village, a "headman" chosen by Government on the basis of heredity, attempted to assert the superiority of his caste and to pronounce himself the supreme authority in the village. The reaction of the educated middle class group to this attack and the manner in which they defended their modern ideals is a significant illustration of the extent to which progressive urban ideals, such as those expounded by Gandhi and Nehru, are capable of penetrating into the life of an Indian village.

Before describing the events which took place in Hattarahalli in 1952, it will be useful to examine the caste system of Hattarahalli and to consider its influence upon social inter-action within the village. The principal caste groupings are Lingayat, Panchāla, Kuruba, Togata, Gāniga, Moslem, and Mādiga. Speaking in terms of social and economic rank, the major division in the village social organization is between the Mādiga and all other castes. The Mādiga are beef eaters and leather workers who are not allowed to enter the village temple or the houses of those belonging to other castes. For the most part, they are agricultural labourers owning little or no land. One or two families are exceptional in that they possess considerable land and other property.

Of the other castes, the Lingāyats were at one time the most powerful caste in the village. They are divided into two distinct groups: the Jangamas and the ordinary Lingāyats. The Jangamas are the priests of the Lingāyats and can be considered to be the Lingāyat equivalent of Brahmins. The Jangamas do not inter-marry with other Lingāyats, but they take food from the latter. In addition, Lingāyats are supposed to take only vegetarian food. According to caste rules, they are not supposed to take food from members of any other caste, but in practice Hattarahalli Lingāyats eat in Brahmin hotels and most of them accept water, sweets, non-alcoholic beverages and fried food from all other castes except the Mādiga and similar depressed Hindu castes. Most have no objections to taking such foods from Moslems or Christians. Such violations of caste rules are common in Hattarahalli. The village has been subjected to a number of urban influences and is somewhat unique in this respect.

The only other vegetarian caste present in significant numbers in Hattarahalli is the Panchāla caste. The Panchāla are an artisan caste of blacksmiths, goldsmiths, stone masons, and carpenters. They claim to be of Kshatriya descent and wear a sacred thread. Their Guru or religious leader, is neither a Brahmin nor a Jangama, but a member of their own caste. The Panchāla, the meat-eating Ganiga or oil merchant caste, and the Mādiga have a traditional relationship which gives the Panchāla and the Gāniga the privilege of settling disputes among the Mādiga. In former days, the Panchāla and Gāniga arranged the marriages of the Mādiga and supervised their religious functions. The Gāniga and the Panchāla accept the same Guru.

The Kuruba and Togata castes are meat-eating Hindu castes. Both of them have Jangama Gurus, but they use Brahmin priests for their marriages. The word, "Kuruba", means shepherd, but the name seems to have little meaning as the Kuruba are generally landowning cultivators. The Togata are a caste of handloom weavers, but most have given up their hereditary occupation as it is no longer profitable. Some are small landowners, but the rest have become labourers.

The Panchāla and Gāniga are supposed to take food only from Brahmins. In practice, they take food from Lingāyats but only a few Lingāyats take cooked food from Panchālas. Most Togatas and Kurubas will not take food from any caste but Lingāyats or Brahmins, or from each other. Moslems take food from all castes except Mādiga. All castes in Hattarahalli take sweets, beverages, and fried foods from all other castes except Mādigas. This is a typical illustration and appears to be a result of urban influences. All castes but the Mādiga are permitted to enter each other's houses, but no caste permits any individuals other than close relatives of the same caste to enter the kitchen. Even the Jangama Gurus of the Togatas and Kurubas are not allowed to enter the kitchens of their followers.

In economic terms, all castes, including the Mādiga, possess one or two wealthy men. Excluding the Togata and the Mādiga; most of the families in the village own five or six acres of dry land, a quarter or half an acre of garden land, and



a quarter of an acre or so of paddy land. The Togata and Mādiga own less and many are agricultural labourers. The economic organization of the village, then, consists of three distinct classes: rich men who own twenty or thirty acres of dry land, one or two acres of garden land, and two to three acres of paddy land; middle class agriculturists who own sufficient land to support themselves and educate their children; and agricultural labourers who own little or no land.

The principal occupation of all members of the six major castes is agriculture, though a few members of each caste continue to practise their traditional occupations. Thus, the Gāniga realize a considerable income from their oil trade and much of their agricultural work is done by labourers. Of the other castes, most earn little or no income from their traditional occupations. There are three Panchālas who are blacksmiths, but their sons and daughters are mostly factory labourers, school teachers, or agriculturists. There is one Jangama priest, but he earns only ten or twenty rupees per year from the performance of his priestly duties. Most of the other Jangamas are agriculturists. One is a tailor, two are school teachers, and one is a salt merchant. The same type of distribution of occupations characterizes the other castes in the village.

A number of castes are represented in the village by one or two small families. The village Shānbog, a Brahmin, has emigrated and his official duties as accountant have been taken over by a wealthy Brahmin from a nearby village. There are two families of immigrant Brahmin school teachers, but they do not wield much influence in village affairs. There is a barber and a washerman both of whom have important ceremonial functions in the village. Neither the barber nor the washerman has much influence on village affairs. In addition, there are a number of families from various "hunting castes", probably descended from forest tribes, which live in the village for a year or two and then move on. These families usually perform agricultural labour.

The relationship between the various castes in Hattarahalli appears to be determined by the economic position of a particular caste at a particular time. There appears to be no complex web of hereditary obligations between families and castes, nor

any strict hierarchy of castes. Washermen, Brahmin, or Jangama priests, blacksmiths, and barbers are generally chosen on the basis of skill and cost. Even in cases where ceremonial obligations are supposed to be observed in connection with particular ceremonies, the absence of particular individuals or even of members of a particular caste does not prevent the performance of the ceremony. In 1952, when the Jangamas failed to attend a particular ceremony, their priestly duties were performed by an ordinary Lingāyat. During the same ceremony, when the Mādiga drummers were absent, two Lingāyats picked up the drums and the ceremony continued. Although many individuals still maintain the custom of distributing grains or *mere* to the Patel, Shānbog, blacksmith, barber, washerman, village menial and other functionaries at harvest time, many of these individuals are now paid in cash at the time the service is performed.

#### EFFECTS OF FAMINE

While one or two of the villagers at Hattarahalli can remember the famine of 1887-88, no one is quite clear whether the village caste system was ever much more complex than it is at present. The lack of hereditary functions among members of the different castes, however, can be attributed to the fact that a large proportion of those living in the village at present are the descendants of individuals who migrated to the village shortly after the famine. Before the famine, the village possessed only three or four separate castes. Hence, there was no opportunity for the development of complex inter-relationships between the castes. The failure of such complex inter-relationships to develop after representatives of a number of different castes had immigrated to the village was evidently due to the influence of urban ideas and to the changes in rural economy produced by the famine.

In the years immediately following the famine, there was a surplus of land and a shortage of labour. Food was cheap and plentiful, but cash for marriages and for paying land taxes was in short supply. Many of the people in the village were penniless immigrants or members of families which had been



impoverished as a result of famine. The social life of the village was dominated by families which had been long established in the village and had a large store of money or those which had a money-making occupation. These consisted of three families of Lingāyats, who were the traditional leaders of the village, and two of Togatas who were powerful because their handloom textiles could be sold for cash.

#### THE ORIGIN OF A MIDDLE CLASS

The combined effect of the famine and of a newly-introduced, British-style, system of administration was to upset this traditional village organization. The five leading families were not able to retain all of the land in the village; much of it was confiscated as they failed to pay the land taxes. Later, the same land was given to the immigrants. This constituted the first step towards the establishment of a middle class in the village. In fact, it can be said that the establishment of the small farmer in Hattarahalli was largely due to an administrative blunder which resulted in excessive taxation followed by confiscation and subsequent re-distribution of the village lands.

During the early years of the twentieth century, the hold of the five wealthy families in the village remained strong. Most of the immigrant families were in debt to these wealthy families and gave them a certain amount of free labour and a share of their agricultural produce. Nevertheless, having lost control of the land, these wealthy families suffered a gradual economic decline. During and after World War I, the small farmers gradually cleared away their debts and established themselves as a middle class element in the village. That is, they were neither labourers nor non-farming landowners.

#### GROWTH OF EDUCATION

Between the first and the second World Wars, the gradual development of the small farmer class in the village was paralleled by the growth of a system of public education in the rural area. Hattarahalli got a primary school in 1910 and

a middle school was established in a neighbouring village in the 1920's. The first batch of students of this middle school took their public examinations in 1924 and most of them were employed as school teachers. By 1930, the production of potential school teachers exceeded the demand and a group of between thirty and forty unemployed educated youths developed in the village. This group, which was unsatisfied with such employment as was available in the village and unable to obtain employment consistent with their new status as the "educated class", demonstrated their dissatisfaction by forming something very similar to the juvenile delinquent "gang" familiar in western countries. They fought with similar gangs from nearby villages, pilfered gardens and woodpiles, and generally made themselves disagreeable to the villagers.

#### POPULATION PRESSURE

Parallel to the development of education in the village was a rapid increase in population and a consequent fragmentation of land holding. In the 1930's although landowning small farmers were becoming increasingly numerous in the village, it was becoming more and more difficult for them to grow sufficient food for their families. Middle class farmers were faced with the prospect of emigrating or becoming labourers upon the lands of large landowners, and their educated children were faced with unemployment.

#### WAR BROUGHT EMPLOYMENT

The coming of World War II and the establishment of a large military camp in the vicinity of the village checked this tendency toward impoverishment. The educated men in the village were able to find profitable employment in the military camp and the small farmer learned to produce "English vegetables" (tomatoes, cabbages, carrots and beets) which he sold at high prices. When the war was over, many of the educated people in the village found jobs as school teachers and factory labourers. The small farmers had accumulated a store of cash and were looking forward to the time when



their high-school-educated sons would find employment in the newly-constructed factories and contribute portions of their salaries to the family budget.

#### CHALLENGE TO VILLAGE LEADERSHIP

In 1952, the village population included ten Government employees, thirty school teachers, fifteen factory workers, and more than thirty educated small farmers. Most of the money-lenders had vanished from the scene and loans were generally obtained from neighbours who were only slightly better off economically than the borrowers. On the other hand, economic conditions were becoming increasingly worse. There was no rain, the ragi (millet) crop gave about one quarter the usual yield and many small farmers were being forced into debt. Once again, as in the 1930's, the survival of the middle class element in the village became doubtful. It was at this time, when the fortunes of the middle class in the village were at their lowest ebb, that the village Patel decided to re-establish his caste as the highest in the village and to establish himself as the ruler of the village. Although the Patel was an educated man and had, at one time, formed a part of the educated group in the village, he was completely under the influence of his mother. His mother is a powerful old woman who believes that her caste was superior to all others. She has driven two of her son's wives out of the house and, despite her age, she controls every action of her son.

#### FIRE-WALKING CEREMONY

The Patel's first move in proclaiming the superiority of his caste was to hold a fire-walking ceremony such as had not been held in the village in sixty years. Elaborate preparations were made including cutting a sandalwood tree belonging to the village. The Patel justified this action by saying that the ceremony would benefit the whole village. At the same time, the Patel refused to admit non-Lingāyats to the ceremony. The Lingāyat Guru who came to conduct the ceremony objected to this because the admission of the people from other castes

would have been of economic value to him. The Patel, who was paying most of the cost of the ceremony, refused to permit this. When others protested against the cutting of a public tree for a private ceremony, the Patel replied that he was the ruler of the village and that even the Government could not interfere in the village without his consent.

Although the non-Lingāyat residents of the village were infuriated by the Patel's actions and talk, they contented themselves with holding a separate ceremony of their own and led a procession of the village deity, Gopālaswāmi, past the fire-walking ceremony shouting derisively. Because there was heavy rain on the night of the fire-walking ceremony, most of the farmers were engaged in agricultural labour for the following week and had little time to worry about the Patel's actions. During the next forty days, however, there was no rain in the village. Standing crops withered and agricultural work came to a standstill. Those who had stocks of grains and landed property were afraid of thieves and those who lacked these resources were faced with the prospect of starvation. As the *ragi* leaves slowly curled and turned brown as a result of drought, tension in the village slowly increased. A number of individuals began to consider the Patel's action and to think of ways and means of punishing him.

#### ĀYUDHA PUJA

A fitting climax to the increasing tension in the village was the *Āyudha Puja* or worship of weapons. This ceremony begins with the sacrifice of a number of sheep and the smearing of their blood on the village carts. It reaches its peak with a procession of the village deity, Gopālaswāmi, to the outskirts of the village and the shooting of an arrow through the branch of the *Sāmi* (*Prospis spicagara*) tree in memory of the actions of the Pandavas when they regained their arms after their exile and prepared to make war upon the Kauravas. This ceremony, coming as it does at the beginning of the "lean months" before harvest, was once a signal for the beginning of small wars and border raids. Before the British came and "all small wars stopped altogether", as the Patel's mother regretfully remarked,



the tensions and aggressions which accompanied the coming of the lean months were worked off in a series of border raids and minor skirmishes. The scars of these battles are still to be seen in the decaying mud forts which are to be found in many nearby villages. Hattarahalli itself was once surrounded by a hedge of thorns. Today, the prospect of the oncoming lean months creates the same sort of tensions which once led to warfare, but these tensions have no outlet except within the village.

#### DISPUTE OVER ORDER OF PRECEDENCE

The first incident in connection with the *Āyudha Puja* concerned the order in which the different castes were to make their offerings. The elders of all castes, including the Patel and his brother-in-law, met on the verandah of the village shop and decided to hold the complete *Āyudha Puja* ceremony for the first time in fourteen years. It was agreed that the Kuruba should make the first offering followed by the Mādiga, Lingāyat, Gāniga, and Panchāla castes. This order was evidently based upon the number of individuals in each caste, but the Panchāla, who are fourth in terms of population, were to make their offering on the fifth day as five is their sacred number. The day after this arrangement had been made, the Patel and a number of Lingāyat families refused to contribute money to the ceremony. Our caste is the highest, they said, and we should make the first offering. Consequently, the rest of the village decided to hold a shorter ceremony with only a few Lingāyat families participating. As a concession to the Lingāyats who sided with the other castes in the village, the Kuruba did not make the first offering. It was made by the Panchāla instead.

After refusing to contribute money to the *Āyudha Puja*, the Patel and his followers made a number of attempts to stop the ceremony. First, he attempted to prevent the Mādiga drummers from appearing. As these drummers are village menials appointed by the Government and supervised by the village Patel, this was not difficult. When the drummers failed to appear, two Lingāyats, who opposed the Patel, picked up the

drums and the ceremony continued. Next, the Patel ordered numbers of his own caste to refuse to serve as priests at a ceremony which must be held at the village gate before taking the image of Gopālaswāmi outside the village. Finally, he brought the image of Basavanna (a bull, the vehicle of Shiva who appeared on earth in the form of a man and founded the Lingāyat religion) and held a separate ceremony in competition with the *Āyudha Puja*. In conducting this ceremony, he demanded the services of the barbers, who serve as pipers at most ceremonies. The barbers refused to attend the *Basavanna Puja* unless it was held at a different hour. As a result, the *Basavanna Puja* and the *Āyudha Puja* were held at different times.

#### THE OBSTRUCTING TAMARIND TREE

When the image of Gopālaswāmi is taken outside the village, it is customary for four men to carry the image to the place of worship outside the village. On this occasion, the image was placed upon a cart and the height of the cart with the image on top of it exceeded twelve feet. The decision to place the image of Gopālaswāmi on a cart was undoubtedly connected with the fact that a tamarind tree belonging to one of the Patel's relatives overhung the road along which the procession was to pass.

Thus, when the procession started, it was found that the image would not pass under this tamarind tree. Those in the procession, some of whom had fortified themselves heavily with alcohol, demanded that the branch of the tree overhanging the road to be cut off. The Patel and other Jangamas rushed out and said that not one leaf of the tree should be touched. Peacemakers in the procession took ropes and began to pull the branch to one side. The Patel felt that this constituted a felonious attack on his tree by a drunken and disorderly mob. He seized one of the Panchālas who was tugging on a rope and searched him for concealed weapons. Present in the assembly was a man who had formerly been a servant in the Panchāla's house. Seeing his former master assaulted, he rushed at the Patel swinging a naked sword. In the nick of time, his friends seized him and took away the sword. By this time, three or



four individuals in each party seemed intoxicated with anger and a riot appeared to be inevitable. Fortunately, the branch was pulled aside, the combatants were separated and the procession continued.

In the twilight, the procession came to the top of a hill near the village and an arrow, signifying the beginning of the war between the Pandavas and the Kauravas, was shot through the branch of the *Sāmi* tree. Just as this ceremony was completed, word came from the village that some Jangama and Lingāyat women had armed themselves with brooms and were planning to attack the procession when it returned to the village and passed under the tamarind tree for the second time. When the procession reached the outskirts of the village, a delegation of hysterical women from the Panchāla and Kuruba castes appealed to the men in the procession to return to the temple by a different route. This appeal had an effect opposite to that intended and those in the procession continued along the same route shouting derisively.

When the procession had come half-way to the tree, the man who had previously attacked the Patel with a sword suddenly lost control of himself and was carried by his friends to the accompaniment of much struggling and shouting to the verandah of a nearby house where he lost consciousness. This dramatic incident apparently broke the tension, for the Patel and his followers allowed the procession to pass under the tree with no remonstrance other than a heavy volley of shouted insults.

#### THE ARM OF LAW INVOKED

The day after this procession, it is customary to carry the image of Gopālaswāmi through the village and for each family to make offerings. A devout elder of the Panchāla caste proposed to bring the matter to a peaceful conclusion by conducting the ceremony alone with a group of children to pull the cart. On hearing of this plan, some women from the Patel's house sat under the tree with bags of *chilli* powder and threatened to throw the powder at any procession which came by. At the same time, the Patel went to the Taluk headquarters with the

intention of filing a complaint against those who had conducted the procession. When he arrived, he found that the others had been there before him and had converted the Taluk officials to their point of view. The next day, a constable came, removed the offending branch, and remained in the village until all ceremonies were completed.

Although the cutting of the tamarind branch resulted in the complete humiliation of the Patel, the aroused villagers were not content to stop there. They continued to agitate against the Patel, refusing to perform any services for members of his caste and refusing to pay taxes. Consequently, the Patel was removed from office. When he complained to the Amildār, the Amildār shouted, "Nonsense, shut up." The Patel, who speaks no English, took this to be a terrible insult and was afraid to say any more. As a further insult to the caste feelings of the Patel, the Amildār consulted with the villagers and chose a member of the Kuruba caste as the new Patel. The reason for this choice was that the Kurubas are, numerically, the largest caste in the village.

#### HEREDITARY PRIVILEGE DETHRONED

The significance of the *Āyudha Puja* incident described above can be interpreted only if the character of the two parties involved is considered. The Patel's party consisted of members of his own caste, the Jangama. Although the Jangama caste is of average economic status in the village at present, it was once the wealthiest caste in the village. The Patel's maternal grandfather owned much of the land in the village and had sixteen tenants on his land and seven serfs in his house. The Patel's party, then, represents that element in the village which wishes to re-establish a feudal type of social hierarchy based on religious tradition and hereditary privilege. It would not be stretching the truth very far to say that the Patel wishes to become the priest-king of the village.

The party opposing the Patel was a heterogeneous collection of individuals from a number of different castes. The members of this group derived their unity from certain ideals of democracy and social equality which they held in common. These



ideals were derived from Government schools, from experience in the nearby military camp during World War II, and from their knowledge of the urban culture of the city.

In short, the *Āyudha Puja* incident represents a direct conflict between conservative traditionalists and the urban oriented middle class school teachers, factory labourers, small farmers and tradesmen of Hattarahalli. The Patel's attack upon the newly-won privileges of this middle class element in the village came during a year of crop failure when many of Hattarahalli's small farmers were living on short rations and borrowing money in order to stay alive. In spite of their economic weakness, the members of the middle class managed to overcome the Patel and his party and to name one of their own number as the new leader of the village. Not only is the middle class in Hattarahalli the largest class numerically, but it also controls the machinery of village government as the *Āyudha Puja* incident demonstrates. Evidently, even poor economic conditions cannot destroy the power of the middle class element in Hattarahalli. The strength of the villagers' reaction to the activities of the Patel and his followers indicates that the rule of rich landowners, priestly castes, and money-lenders has come to an end in Hattarahalli.

MANY of the aspects of the social structure of the Republic of India have been clearly presented in previous articles in this series. Dr. Srinivas has given an excellent account of the general features of village structure and as Dr. Carstairs has pointed out these occur in other regions as well as in the south. The several detailed descriptions of particular villages furnish valuable information on the way these general features function under local conditions. Even in the "Hermit" village of Kulu which stands alone in its isolation from other villages, Dr. Rosser describes Kanets and Lohars as being mutually inter-dependent, each having status relative to the other. Juridical authority lies with the village council and this authority is essentially non-coercive. It is in the presence of these and similar features that one recognizes the distinctive stamp of Indian village life. It is as though there were just so many coloured fibres, but that on different looms these were differently combined to form new patterns. Perhaps this fact accounts for the unity one feels in Indian life despite all its variety.

Yet this quality could be over-emphasized, and Mr. Newell has called attention to the peculiarities which distinguish one district from another, and to insist on their importance. Popular stereotypes about Bengalis and Punjabis and Madrasis are not always idly formulated. And, in smaller sections, a single custom may throw all the elements into quite different focus. The varied content of this series of studies is ample evidence of the fact that familiarity with one part of India should never be taken as conclusive knowledge of any other.

A third factor emphasized in this series, in several instances in the titles of the articles, is that of change. Changes are coming about so rapidly in village life that their nature and direction demand the most careful and detailed attention. This is particularly true since the need for greater productivity in the economic sphere has led to an Indian programme of



planned change in village life. Although existing conditions may not be good in themselves, they do nevertheless represent an equilibrium of social forces acquired over a number of years. Unintelligent planning can upset this equilibrium yet fail to introduce any substitute of relative value to production. Unplanned changes are often far-reaching enough without placing additional strain upon inter-personal relations through inept planning. This fact should never, of course, be construed as an argument against change, for the *status quo* carries no quality which is inevitably valuable. But the unpredicted effects of change may often be disturbing especially in the intricately balanced society of India.

#### BASIS OF UNITY

Dr. Srinivas has already suggested that the interdependence of castes within the village is one of the factors making for village unity. He calls this the "vertical unity of many castes" and contrasts it with a "horizontal unity" of castes in which caste alliances go "beyond the village". Not only do castes inter-lock within the village to form an adhesive whole, but the spread of castes over several villages serves to form an inter-locking mesh. Cross-village ties may, indeed, become so strong that village unity suffers. Dr. Miller has shown how difficult it now is to speak of a clearly demarcated village community in Kerala and he points out that the "vertical" system of rights and obligations between castes is not confined to the village.

In the present article, emphasis will be placed on various aspects of social structure discerned in one section of the Punjab. Under the British Raj, Punjab province was divided into twenty-nine administrative districts. Roughly six of these are included in the section under discussion. The tract is that which was the nucleus of Sikh population and extended from the country south of the Sutlej River, including Ludhiana and Ferozepur, to the region across the Beas River. The cities of Amritsar and Lahore lie within it. The line of partition between West and East Punjab came through the heart of this tract and there is probably no section in the western areas of the sub-continent that was so immediately and tragically affected by

the partition. Despite the great changes which the last six years have brought to families and to villages in this region, change will not be dwelt on here. Attention will centre on the continuing features of society. The last hundred years have been eventful ones for the Punjab, yet through all the literature of this period run certain stable threads of village life. Field work, carried on shortly after partition, centred in villages where population changes had been at a minimum. These were, naturally, the mainly Muslim villages of the Pakistan portion of the tract and the mainly Hindu and Sikh villages of the Indian portion. As Dr. Miller has chosen to do a general picture of village structure for North Kerala, so this picture of Punjabi social structure is also general. In certain aspects it surely extends beyond the tract within which work has been concentrated. There are also variations within the tract and it should be understood that the more detailed information refers to the Sikh segments of the population. Where this is true, the Sikh derivation of the data will be specified.

#### THE LAY OUT

As in many parts of India, the physical unity of the Punjabi village is immediately obvious. Houses of adobe cluster closely together forming a compact unit. Streets are lined by the walls of adjoining house compounds and unite the various parts of the village. They open out into each other so that some of the wider ones are recognizably main arteries. The village is generally entered by way of one or the other of these main thoroughfares, however narrow it may be, and it leads, however tortuously, to an open area, or areas, where shops cluster and/or where the open meeting place of the village is situated. Tanks may occur within or on the edges of villages. Since agriculture is by irrigation, the fields fan out from the sources of water, whether wells or canals. In the more arid and less populated regions, the village is surrounded by its fields which gradually peter out into desert. This pattern is clearly visible from the air. Looking from a plane window, one sees the country dotted with irregular patches on the brown plain. The patches are the warm colour of adobe at the centre, turn suddenly to green as



the fields begin, and then fade out at the edges as the water is no longer sufficient to maintain the full vigour of the crops. In richer areas, the fields of one village adjoin those of the next and the settlement pattern is no longer so clear. Some villages are walled. But in any case, the housing area stops abruptly with the walls of the outer compounds. There are few instances of straggling buildings and one is either inside the village or outside it.

#### CONCEPTUAL BOUNDARIES

Sikhs have tended to limit ritual to a small part of their religion and no ritual boundaries are spoken of. Nevertheless, there are explicit conceptual boundaries to a village. And whatever actual form a village may have taken over the years, Sikhs tend to think of it as a building unit bifurcated in two directions by highways running north-south and east-west. It is thus divided in their minds into four equal sections. In this conceptualization, the meeting place of the village is in the open space in the centre of the village where the two highways cross, with the shops clustering around its edge, and *gurdwāras* are situated outside the village beyond the dwellings at the four places where the roads leave the village. In actuality, many Muslim tombs and shrines, and many holy places of both Sikhs and Hindus are outside of the dwelling space of the village and along the approaches to it. Even in villages which are not walled, I have been told several times by Sikhs that the punishments meted out by village *panchāyats* occurred at the "gate" of the village. Both physically and conceptually, therefore, the village is a unit.

One of the difficulties which arises in discussing East and West Punjab is that one feels inclined to speak of the "Hindu", "Muslim" or "Sikh" features of village life. So much of the recent history of the Punjab has served to accentuate the religious differences of its population, that these are the distinctions which immediately leap to mind. My own data do not confirm that these are, in actuality, the most significant divisions to be considered in regard to settlement patterns.

## TRIBAL GROUP

The population of East and West Punjab is divided among a relatively small number of what are variously called castes or tribes. Since these are in many cases distinguished from the *jāti* by the people themselves, and since they are frequently said to have originated from tribal groups, authorities on the Punjab generally prefer the word tribe. These tribes are not racially distinct, nor are they isolated from the bulk of the people by custom or belief. Rather the bulk of the population is divided among them. The most numerous and important tribes in the neighbourhoods of Amritsar and Lahore are the Jāts and Rājputs. Aroras and Arains are likewise numerous. Members of these tribes may be of any religious persuasion: there are Hindu Jāts, Muslim Jāts and Sikh Jāts. Jāts are the dominant group within Sikhism, and the most significant Rājput groups are Muslim. The Jāts have a reputation for fine husbandry and have often been referred to as the "yeomen" of the Punjab. Rājputs are also cultivators. Both the Sikh Jāts and the Rājputs follow other occupations as well and both are famous as warriors and soldiers. Although this matter needs further research, I have the impression that the home arrangements of the tribes are similar. Marked differences occur within any one village as to the detailed arrangements of living quarters. Some families tether animals within the compound, others have a separate cattle area outside; the placement of rooms and cooking arrangements are strikingly dissimilar. Yet Jāt homes tend to be alike. This likeness persists whether the families are Hindus, Sikhs, or Muslims. I have also noted similarities within other tribes irrespective of religion or the exact position of the village. What at first seems to be a haphazard internal arrangement of village compounds, may therefore be adherence to traditional home planning on the part of the various tribes.

## SUBDIVISIONS OF VILLAGE

Confirmation of the tentative hypothesis that settlement patterns are tribally influenced comes from the *Lahore District Gazetteer* for 1916 (page 33): "In the older Jāt villages of the



Majha it will be generally found on close inspection that the houses are divided off in some sort of order according to the *pattis*, *tarafs* or other internal subdivisions observed in the village constitution." Whether this is more obvious in Jāt villages than in villages in which other tribes are predominant should be carefully checked. Conceptually, Sikhs (who are mainly Jāts) certainly associate the four quarters into which the highways divide the village with the *pattis* of the village. Actually, villages are subdivided whether their inhabitants are mainly Jāt, or Hindu, or Muslim. And the inhabitants know the boundaries of the divisions within the village though they are well aware that families belonging to division A may be living in division B because of such circumstances as overcrowding and availability of housing. The subdivisions of the villages have both boundaries and recognised membership, even though these may not exactly correspond. Each subdivision may also have its own open meeting place, its own shops and its own holy places. I have been told (by Jāts) that even dogs know the boundaries of the *pattis* to which they belong and will not allow canine trespassers. Not only are villages, units physically and conceptually, but it can be seen that village subdivisions are also units. Before giving additional instances of village and *patti* unity one other aspect of Punjabi village make-up should be clarified.

#### COMMON ANCESTRY

The people of villages and *pattis* are often said to be descended from a common ancestor. Thus, the four *pattis* of a village will be said to have been established by four brothers, the descendants of each man forming the basic population in each *patti*. Such groups bear a name which is thought of today as a "family name". This name they hold in common with, for instance, the people of the home village from which the founding brother emigrated. Not all persons bearing the same name can trace relationship but they regard themselves as related and will not, therefore, marry. These exogamous, patrilineal groups are generally called *gots* in the tract of the Punjab under consideration. Hutton has discussed the relation between clans and *gots* (*Caste in India*, pages 48-50) in connection with Rājput

*gots*. Jāts and other tribes of the Punjab are similarly divided. In actuality, few, if any, villages are composed solely of members of one *got*. Nevertheless, villages are spoken of as being Sidhu villages, Ghil villages, etc. This refers to the fact that the village is said to have been founded by one or more Sidhus or Ghils, and that Sidhus or Ghils are the dominant group in the village, probably both numerically and in respect to the amount of land owned or farmed. In a similar way, the quotation above referred to a "Jāt village". Here again few villages, however small, would be composed entirely of Jāts. The same holds for religious groups. When the old Punjabi village was described as either Hindu, Muslim or Sikh, reference was to the dominant group in the village, not to the religious affiliation of its entire population. Villages, then, were ordinarily composed of populations including several *gots*, several tribes and several religions.

#### EXOGENOUS UNITS

Despite the lack of homogeneity in village population, villages of the Punjab are exogamous units. *Pattis* are also said to be exogamous but since they exist only within the larger unit this is relatively meaningless. Even in villages of three or four thousand, marriages are not arranged within the village. It would be interesting to know whether the *patti* becomes the functioning exogamous unit in towns, which are of larger size, but I have no information on this matter. It is enough for our present purposes to note that, for all the variety of its population, the unity felt to exist within the village is so strong as to make marriage within it an impossibility.

At the time field work was being carried out, a number of villages had Government-recognised *pañchāyats*. Unofficial *pañchāyats* were also sometimes present, generally partially overlapping in personnel. *Pattis* may likewise have their own *pañchāyats*, intra-*patti* affairs being referred to the *patti pañchāyat* and inter-*patti* affairs going to the village *pañchāyat*. These seem once to have been a common feature of Punjabi village life. The identity of the *patti* is clearly marked by the organization of athletic teams. Sports contests are fairly common in the Punjab. Teams may be recruited from *gots*, one *got* playing



another, or *patti* teams may play with other *pattis*, the final village team chosen for competition with other villages being the winner in the play-off. Disputes between single members of *pattis* may quickly involve other members so that *patti* is lined up against *patti*. In any dispute between villages, however, the members of the various *pattis* tend to unite, all castes and religions functioning as village members on such occasions even against co-caste and co-religious members. Examples of such incidents where villages united against villages were given in disputes over boundaries, rights to irrigation water, and insults to women. (In contrast, it should be noted that the example of a village dispute given on Mysore by Dr. Srinivas involved ritual prerogatives.)

#### AFFILIATIONS

In order to understand how *patti* and village affiliation can cut across lines established by caste and religion in the Punjab even when there is little formal and recognized machinery of organization, it is necessary to realize the strength of what Dr. Srinivas has referred to as vertical unity. This seems to depend economically upon two factors. The first is the relative permanency of certain ties between specific high and low caste groups. These hereditary service-customer relations are well described under the *Jājmāni System* for Uttar Pradesh (W. H. Wiser, Lucknow, 1936) and referred to by Dr. Srinivas for Mysore where the "master" calls his "servant" *halemaga* (old son), and by Mr. Newell as *birton* agreements. Terminology and details seem to vary but such arrangements between families of different caste, continuing from one generation to the next, seem once to have been common in many parts of the sub-continent and still show considerable vigour. The second factor influencing vertical unity is by no means distinct from the first but operates in less individualized terms. This is what Dr. Srinivas has called the "interdependence" of castes which rests, in turn, upon their social and economic specialization.

#### SIKH AND MUSLIM CASTES

In other parts of India it is reported that a religious minority in an otherwise Hindu population is treated as a caste. Even

when the size of such a group is large its position in the caste hierarchy is often described as though it ranked as a single entity. Sikhs have similarly been equated with a caste in the Punjab. If one considers the occupational aspects of caste, i.e., those aspects which depend upon social and economic specialization, this is, however, an unwarranted simplification of the facts concerning Punjabi social life. Although both Sikhs and Muslims explicitly deny the religious sanction of the Vedic caste system, there are Sikh and Muslim castes. Because of their religious beliefs, all men tend to be regarded as equal, irrespective of caste, within the shadow of the *gurdwāra* or mosque. Nevertheless, in daily life Sikh and Muslim castes were, and are, fully recognized. Thus, the Muslim *mochi* is the same occupational caste as the Hindu or Sikh *chamār*, though often of slightly better social position; but there was said to be no difference between the *machhi* and the *jhinwār* except that the former was entirely Muslim and the latter only predominantly so. Sikhs and Muslims did not form two single castes in the Punjab before partition, and today in areas largely Sikh or Muslim in East and West Punjab there are still a number of interdependent castes.

The way economic specialization worked within the village may be illustrated by the steps involved in the production of a single garment in the village of Dakhar, East Punjab, south of the Sutlej. Sheep were not raised in Dakhar, so a Sikh woman, wife of a grain farmer of high caste, would purchase wool from travelling herders who regularly visited the village. This wool then went to a Sikh untouchable for cleansing. The woman generally did the spinning herself. Dyers in the village were Muslim and the spun wool was processed by one of them. Weaving could be done by either a Muslim or a Sikh since the village contained two weaving castes distinguished by religion, the choice between them being determined by a relationship between families paralleling that of the *jājmāni*. All the tailors were Hindu. The finished jacket, therefore, was the joint product of several castes. Self-interest welded not only the castes, but the religious groups as well, into a single inter-locking system. In view of this specialization, the economic confusion resultant upon the sudden withdrawal from Dakhar of its



Muslim inhabitants in the summer of 1947 can easily be imagined.

#### EFFECTS OF PARTITION

Quite apart from other disturbing features of partition, the economic dislocation on the village level necessitated major readjustments and has probably had the effect of weakening the interdependency of castes within the village. One joint family of Sikhs, for instance, took the opportunity furnished by a journey to Delhi made by one of its members to have him buy a bolt of tweed. From this tweed the Hindu tailor made jackets for the five adult men of the family. In this instance it is the finished cloth which is purchased rather than the raw wool. Specialization or division of labour is still involved but, with the withdrawal of key figures in the interlocking system, the number of linked groups has been reduced so that vertical unity is weakened. The next step, that of purchasing ready-made jackets, is still not a frequent village practice. Since my data were collected just after partition, I do not know to what extent groups of specialists from incoming fellow-religionists have been able to take over previous occupations and reconstitute the old interdependency. Many factors would certainly lead them to make the attempt despite the difficulties which would be presented to their absorption as full village members. For certain tasks of immediate concern to the continuance of daily existence, such as oil pressing (mustard oil is a Punjabi food staple), it is astonishing how quickly the gap made by the loss of members of Muslim oil-pressers was filled by Hindus and Sikhs in East Punjab. Whole groups crossed caste lines to take up this economic task.

As Dr. Miller has already indicated, the mutual rights and obligations which characterize caste relations may extend beyond the village so that vertical unity itself goes beyond the village. Throughout north India it often happens that Brahmins, *dhobis* or other groups necessary to the life of a village, live outside it in nearby villages. In a previous article ("The Misal: A Structural Village Group of India and Pakistan," *American Anthropologist*, Vol. 54, pp. 41-56, January-March

1952), I have suggested that villages thus linked by the network of the social and economic specializations of their caste groups may form structural units with possible political overtones. According to Dr. Miller, this is confirmed for North Kerala where the mutual obligation between villages "is probably one of the factors formerly contributing to the unity of the *nād* (chiefdom)".

That mutual interests dependent upon specialization continue to relate different communities is made clear in the recent survey of the economic and social position of the *chamārs* of Barpali in Orissa (*The Economic Weekly*, September 19, 1953). Owners of dead cattle call for a Ganda, a Ghāsi or a Chamār who disposes of the skin to a Bepari Chamār. All hides pass through the hands of the Bepari Chamārs who in turn depend upon the Ghāsis to transport them by bullock cart to another village where they are purchased by Mahājans who are Muslims. This overlapping of caste and religious groups exactly parallels the Punjabi situation. In the Punjab, the politically divisive forces of religion were so capitalized that the economic links between persons of different religions became additional irritants. No business relation runs smoothly all the time and every incident could be developed into a religious—and political—grievance. In a different atmosphere, however, the same social and economic links might serve as part of the adhesive making for unity not only within the village but in a larger sphere as well. That such situations have had political significance in India in the past now seems probable. However this may be in the future, the recognition of the existence of a social and economic unity which goes beyond the physical boundaries of any single village leads us in two directions.

#### INTER-VILLAGE DEPENDENCE

The first of these concerns what is often spoken of as village self-sufficiency. It is usual in discussing changes which are coming about in Indian village affairs to contrast the former self-sufficiency of the village with its present relative dependence upon items brought in from outside where they are industrially produced. The classical example of such change is



the introduction of factory-spun cotton cloth. Another example is given above in the buying of woven woollen cloth. There is no doubt that this is a significant change. The self-sufficiency of the Punjabi village, however, can be greatly over-estimated. Spices and metals are necessities which have been brought in from outside for centuries at least. The village may be isolated. Taken in its larger context, *i.e.*, including those villages with which it regularly exchanges goods or services, it is even self-reliant and self-dependent. But the term self-sufficient in economics is apt to conjure up the picture of the pioneer communities in the New World. These communities furnish a striking contrast with industrial society. Not only were they, like the Indian villages, almost entirely self-dependent in that few necessities or services had to be brought in from outside, but they were made up of families which contained within themselves the skill necessary for maintenance. When a family, or a man, in such a community is spoken of as self-sufficient, it is implied that he can maintain himself very largely without any outside assistance of either skills or services. In the United States today rural communities still partake of a considerable element of this sort of self-sufficiency. And it is this which furnishes the greatest contrast with modern urban and industrial life in which services are interdependent. The change toward industrialization in the West has been a change toward specialization and toward interdependency. There is still considerable residue of feeling about the effect of this upon the human being; it is often said in the West that a man who must depend upon others is in some sense less a man. Such a statement must have small significance to an Indian villager.

#### SHIFT IN SPECIALIZATION

If manufactured goods from outside are accepted in the Indian village, it is not only because new needs have been created—the villager has for many decades had more needs than he could satisfy—but also because their very acceptance is a release from the pressure of traditional dependencies. As in the incident of the jacket, purchased items often actually represent a step toward increased self-sufficiency for the family rather

than away from it. It is then necessary to distinguish between the self-sufficiency of the pioneer family which contained all the resources needed for its continuance and the self-sufficiency of the urban dweller who is able to maintain self-sufficiency through reliance upon a money economy. The latter is possible only because of an intricate network of mutually dependent services and specializations. As long as we mean by self-sufficiency in India an earlier condition under which few manufactured items were introduced into the village from outside, we are treading on fairly safe ground. But so soon as we imply by the term that the shift toward industrialization involves a shift toward specialization and toward interdependency, we are falling very wide off the mark. The effect of industrialization upon the Indian village is to shift from one sort of interdependency to another, from one sort of specialization to another.

Considerable analysis of the nature of specialization in world societies remains to be done. We do know enough, however, both about industrialization and the Indian village to recognize that many of the generalizations often heard concerning the effects of industrialization on the village are distressingly facile, and their implications frequently misleading. It is safest to be much more specific about the particular processes one has in mind.

Once it is recognized that the structural unity brought about by the interaction of caste specializations extends beyond the village, a second problem faces us. Is the village a community which can be studied as such? There is no doubt about the strong sense of village identity which has been discussed above. The Punjabi village shares this sense of internal unity and identity with villages in many parts of the world. It is something the Westerner is well able to understand. But if the village has *necessary* ties with other villages can it be intelligibly studied as a single community?

The significance of this question is intensified by the "horizontal" unity of castes which form alliances going beyond village boundaries. Caste *panchāyats* were once strong and the usual ties between caste members exist in the Punjab as in other parts of India.



## AFFINAL TIES

The Punjabi village has already been described as an exogamous unit. This means that every marriage involves the village with other villages and that all affinal ties go beyond its boundaries. Dr. Marriott has described marriage in a U. P. village and has pointed out that the "structuring of marriage puts limits on the degree to which a village can manage its economic affairs as a local unit". In the village he discusses, marriage is patrilocal as in the Punjab and the direction in which girls pass determines marriage relations between villages. Thus, if a marriage is arranged between a man in village *A* and a girl in village *B*, village *A* is said to be "high" in respect to village *B* (which is, therefore, "low") and in the future wives may go from *B* to *A* but the direction is not reversed. Village *B* would, alternatively, be "high" in regard to those villages from which wives had been taken. Sikhs have made a conscious effort to limit the expense of weddings and reduce the economic exchanges at marriage. This has been only partially successful but in any case the network of villages formed by marriage ties can be directly compared with that described for the U. P. In the Punjab three geographical strips are distinguished which lie very roughly north and south of each other: the Majha in which Amritsar is situated, the Duaba (or Doab) in the centre, and the Mālwa to the south. It is said by Sikhs that, although most marriages naturally occur between villages fairly close to each other and therefore within these strips, marriages across their boundaries tend to be arranged so that girls pass from south to north, toward Amritsar. To the extent that this is considered in arranging a marriage it would imply that the villages nearer the Holy City of the Sikhs were "higher" than those more distant from it. Otherwise villages are not regarded as "high" or "low" in regard to the direction of marriages. However, each village is said to have a traditional set of villages to whom its girls regularly go in marriage and another set from which it regularly receives wives. It is thus perfectly clear to the villagers that they are part of a network of villages organized on marital lines.

To determine the constitution of such a network, and to check on its existence, requires particular data as well as general statements. The following Sikh material comes from a genealogical study made for me by Gurcharan Singh in April, 1949, of *got* Dhillon, *patti* Raja Raja, *tahsil* Taran Taran, village Jhabal, district Amritsar, East Punjab. The data were analyzed in the winter of 1950-51 by McKim Marriott. The genealogy contains 402 names beginning with Raja Raja who founded the *patti* and continues through the patrilineal line to a few descendants in the present and tenth generation. Women's names only begin to appear in the sixth generation within the memory of living informants. Between the sixth and ninth generations 208 marriages are reported, those from the seventh to the ninth probably approaching full coverage. Eighteen villages are listed as those from which wives should be obtained. Actually eighty-two villages are involved. Of the eighteen only thirteen are found at all and two of these occur but rarely. Taken together the list of preferred villages accounts for about one-half of the known marriages, *i.e.*, half the marriages of four generations have formed repeated links between fifteen other villages and Jhabal, the other half, scattered over sixty-seven villages, forming positive but weaker ties. Marriages occur in only one direction with five villages of the preferred list and a large number of the other villages. Absolute un-indirectionability, however, is not confirmed. Marriages are also traditionally preferred between Dhillons and six other *gots*. Five of these are actually those with which marriages are most frequently arranged, although the other fails to appear at all. One of the preferred *gots* (Sandhu) accounts for 100 marriages, nearly half of the known total; the other four account for fifty-five marriages or one-quarter of the total. The remaining quarter of the marriages is spread over eighteen other *gots*.

Both village and *got* marital preferences seem in actuality to be contingent upon other factors as well. Chief among these seems to be the factor of spatial distance. No marriages at all have occurred within four miles of Jhabal. Not only, therefore, is the village exogamous in actuality as well as in theory, but the region surrounding the village is also exogamous



in practice. The fact that it is regarded as indecent for the bride and groom to have even seen each other before marriage undoubtedly is one of the main reasons for this. Four miles apparently carries one beyond the acquaintanceship and potential visibility range. Yet great distance furnishes a practical barrier to marriage, for two-thirds of the marriages have taken place with villages between four and twelve miles from Jhabal, with the greatest number clustering around the eight-mile radius. Less than one-fifth of the marriages link Jhabal with any place more than sixteen miles away. Since Jhabal is in the Majha and Amritsar falls within its marriage range, these data furnish no information as to directional ties between the Majha and the Duaba. To get a clear picture of the inter-locking of villages through marital ties, we should have data not only on the other parts of Jhabal's population, but of all the ties of all the villages with which Jhabal is linked. The scope and complexity of any such material can easily be seen to be practically prohibitive. Nevertheless, the data available to us in this analysis well illustrate the extent to which Punjabi village interests extend beyond village boundaries. For any attempt to understand the interpersonal relations, or the social motivations, of one *got* of one of Jhabal's *pattis*, the marital community to be considered would start four miles away and have to include at least those villages up to eight miles distant. This type of necessary relationship is not always easy for the Westerner to understand.

#### STRAIN ON FAMILY BUDGETS

In the Punjab, economic bonds within the patrilocal joint family have also operated to extend village contacts. With natural limits placed upon the amount of arable land available to each village, and with constantly rising population figures, the strain upon family budgets has been considerable even for land-owning joint families. The traditional way of handling this problem has been for one or more younger sons to leave the village and take up employment at a distance. These men were ordinarily married before they left and their wives and young children remained in the family to be cared for. Any

possible proceeds of their employment were then sent back to defray the upkeep of their families and to eke out the joint family finances. Needless to say, the amount of these remittances depended on a number of individual factors and they were regularly forwarded to the heads of other responsible members of the joint families. Dr. Bailey has mentioned that a similar practice adds to the income of his Oriya-speaking village and it is certainly known in other parts of India as well. Yet the numbers of men who leave Punjabi villages for outside employment may well be unusually large. The *Gazetteer* for 1916 (p. 34) states that "immigration into Lahore city is very large, 436 per mille of the inhabitants being born outside the district. . . . The nature of the immigration has led to a preponderance of males, and the proportion in the city is only 596 females per thousand males." Other men went further afield than Lahore and numbers of Punjabis joined the Imperial Army. It was always expected that these men would return to their home villages, and their places in their joint families were kept secure. The result of this has been that hardly a Sikh village today is without its experienced traveller, its old soldier, or its former city dweller.

#### COMMUNAL ORGANIZATIONS

Under modern conditions, the strength of Punjabi communal organization should also be taken into account if we are to understand village life. Relationships between Government representatives and the villager before partition were effectually limited to tax collecting and policing. With rationing, and especially since partition, there has been an increase in Government services and contacts in the village both in East and West Punjab. Nevertheless, the opportunities given to the villager for participating in Government have been practically nil. This fact is coupled with the strange paradox that the Punjabi villager is often an expert politician. He spends a great deal of his time assessing personal motivations against a background of possible economic and social advantage. He knows how to play clique against clique and he has a shrewd sense of positive leadership. During the last hundred years,



the major outlet for these capacities has been in the communal organizations, all of which have had their political as well as their religious side. The intricate organizations built up by such groups as the followers of Guru Gobind Singh, the Ahmadiya and the Ārya Samāj must be studied to be believed. Lacking a place in Governmental organization, Punjabis have built their own organizations which penetrate to the village level as Government does not. In the paper quoted above, I gave details of the main Government structure within which the Punjabi village is encapsulated. In contrast to this, there tends to be a constant flow of interest and involvement in communal affairs straight from the smallest village to the leaders. It is no wonder that votes are often determined by this stream of allegiance. Limitations of space make it impossible to give details here of the way the communal organizations function at the village level. But even a superficial knowledge of Punjabi politics is convincing evidence of the communal interest taken by many villagers.

Like caste alliances, communal ties form a strong element of horizontal unity, structurally relating the affairs of one village with those of others distant from it. Numerous forces in modern life have worked to weaken the old caste alliances but these seem in many cases to have been supplanted by communal participation. Government insistence upon village and *patti* unity for administrative purposes has undoubtedly served to provide an additional element in vertical unity, which is being increased with the increasing official recognition of village *panchāyat*. Whether one is thinking of the past or the present, the unity of the Punjabi village and the ties beyond it with other villages must be weighed together. Vertical and horizontal unities must be considered together in any analysis of village life.

#### UNITY IN DIVERSITY

Under these circumstances, the extent to which the village may be considered a single "community" seems to me extremely limited. In terms of economic and social specialization, marital ties, and religious and political organization, the

structural unit is larger than the village. These are not contacts in which the villager may indulge, they are imposed upon him by the habits of his existence. Important as single village studies may be, therefore—and I would be the last to underestimate their significance—it does not seem to me that any complete picture of Punjabi life can ever be obtained from them alone. Punjabi society is not a mosaic made up of separate and self-sufficient village fragments. It is more like a carpet in which each part, although unified and identifiable in itself, is inextricably woven into the fabric. Thus the social structure of the Punjab resolves itself into a balance of various structures each of which must be considered if we are to grasp the meaning of the whole.

The painstaking reader will already have recognized that our analyses have proceeded on several different levels. Perhaps this is inevitable in the present stage of our knowledge concerning the forces at work in society. Several factors operative in Punjabi village life have not been considered here at all. Yet if we are looking toward the future, it is encouraging to realize that the co-operation of Indian and Western social scientists is gradually building up a body of trustworthy information on India which can hardly be paralleled for any other nation of the world.



ONLY a short distance from the city of Calcutta the face of the land changes. The country is dotted with villages varying in size and population, with occasional towns. Although the inhabitants of these villages are in contact with the city, the contact is of a limited type.

The village we speak of lies thirty miles from the railroad station of Howrah in the district of Hooghly. It is a short distance from the temples of Tārakeshwara, and local trains running on the small line will take one there from Calcutta in two hours. The village has a railroad station and is therefore easy to reach. The total area of the village land is about two square miles. The greater part of the residential section lies on the eastern side of the rail lines, while on the western side lie the fields, and the settlements of the Kāyastha and the Dhoba castes. The river Kaushiki runs through a part of the village. It is only a dry stream in the winter but has a considerable body of water during the rains. The village with its fields sprawls about with no particular geometric shape. The boundaries between villages in this area are the fallow lands, the broad *aals* (raised, thin strips of land separating the fields), the river, and the main roads. The distinction of one village from another is mainly a matter of tradition. The Union Board gives formal recognition to the village for purposes of administration under the designation of *mauzā*. A *mauzā* may be a single village such as ours, or a combination of two or more small villages.

#### HOUSING

Within the village, members of each of the castes live together in separate neighbourhoods, and these areas are called by the names of the castes living in them. However, there is no uniform rule about this, and members of the same caste may

be found to be living at great distances and sometimes lower caste people may be found to settle near high caste houses if they are the tenants of the latter. The houses and the fields are interspersed, the houses being clustered on the higher lands.

The village has 324 houses and huts. Of these, only five are brick houses, belonging to families who were affluent in the past. The remainder are clay structures thatched with straw. Many of the latter have cement floors and white-washed walls. A house usually consists of several structures built around a square courtyard with a high wall running round the house. Each structure has only one room. In a joint household, one room is made available to each married couple. It is possible to add to the house by building additional rooms within the courtyard or outside the wall. When a house is partitioned among different units of a joint family, the members claim the room they have already been occupying along with a part of the courtyard, and separate structures may be installed to serve as kitchens.

Among poorer people, and usually among the lower castes, the courtyards are smaller and the number of rooms fewer. The rooms are also smaller. These dwellings usually accommodate individual family units and not joint households. Naturally houses belonging to the lower castes can be distinguished from the others in their general appearance.

#### PATTERN OF CULTIVATION

All the villagers are engaged in the cultivation of land. Rice is the basic crop grown, and is used entirely for local consumption. The majority of the people have to buy rice from outside sources, in addition to what they grow. Potato and jute are grown in large quantities as cash crops and provide ready money. They are grown alternatively on the same fields, which are at a high level while *aman* paddy is grown on low-lying land. The individual holder of land does not have all his plots together. He may have some plots in the potato fields, some in the paddy fields, some on one side of the village, and some on another. Lentils are grown in quantities sufficient for the villagers' own consumption. Vegetables are also grown.



The crops are grown in the following time order. On the higher lands, jute is sown in the middle of April and it is cut and sold in September. Potatoes are planted in October, and they are dug up and sold in March, when the land is turned over again to jute. In small portions of these fields, lentil (*kalai*) seeds are sown, some in April and some in October. On the *aman* paddy lands, paddy seedlings are raised in May and transplanted in June. In December the paddy is cut, and it is threshed and separated from the stalks in March. Later, rice is husked by women.

Fruit trees of all types native to the area, such as mango, *bel*, *jamrul*, *kul*, *guava*, banana and papaya abound in the village, and supply the residents with fresh fruits. Ponds are maintained for growing fish as well as for bathing and washing. Bamboo clusters are a familiar sight in this area. Bamboo is necessary for the roofs of the clay structures, and it also fetches a good price in the towns.

The upper groups have their land cultivated on the share system. The owner of the land supplies half the seed and manure or half their cost, while the cultivator supplies the other half and the plough and the bullocks, besides his own labour, and the crop is shared equally. If one wants the entire produce, the cultivators are hired on a daily wage. Similarly, the owners lease the fish ponds to fishermen for a period of time, and the latter look after the ponds and the fish. Whenever the owner of the pond has need of fish, the fisherman is sent for. Fish is caught with a net, and the owner and fisherman share the catch equally. If a householder wants all the fish, he must buy the fisherman's share at the market price. The circulation of money is limited, to a minimum within the village, barter and the exchange of services being common.

#### LAND TENURE

None of the householders owns very large quantities of land. There are no exceptionally rich men in this village. The joint family properties are divided into smaller shares with each succeeding generation. It is difficult to find out how much land

each family owns. Roughly, land onwership may be said to be of three types :

- (1) government property such as that owned by the rail-roads,
- (2) land for which a road cess is paid to the Government, such as the *brahmottar* lands which were at one time gifts from the Maharaja of Burdwan to the Brahmans of this and surrounding villages, and the *māl* lands owned by the Kāyasthas which were acquired formerly from zamindars on lease and for which rent is no longer paid, and
- (3) *prajāswatta* land, or land for which a fixed rate of *khājnā* (rent) is paid yearly to the direct owner of land in the village or to a non-resident zamindar.

All the Brahmans have *brahmottar* land. However, other castes may also have such land, for a Brahman in need will sell his land to anybody, and has often done so in the past. The Kāyasthas got the *māl* land while working for the *zamindārs* in the old days. Much of the *prajāswatta* land is today owned by the Young Men's Zamindāri Co-operative Society Limited. The former *zamindār* of this village who resided in Midnapur sold his *zamindāri* to this co-operative society. The latter consists of several non-residents who have taken up the management of this *zamindāri* as their chief occupation. Due to the continuous division of land, individual landowners among the higher castes now each own about fifteen to thirty *bighas* of land. The lower castes are usually tenants on *prajāswatta* land, but many have also bought some land in addition, each one owning from two to five *bighas* of land.

#### INDUSTRIES

The village is self-sufficient for everyday purposes. A few shops for sweets and medicines have sprung up recently near the railroad station but there is no market within its boundaries. A *hāt* (weekly or bi-weekly market) is held twice a week on a piece of land bordering on the next village, a mile and half



away. All the consumers' necessities are met by this *hāt*. A daily market is held in a town two miles away, and people shop there during an emergency.

The major cottage industry in this area is weaving. Weaving is a hereditary occupation of the Tantis. This area is well-known for the production of some fine types of cotton *saris* and *dhotis*. The weavers are always in touch with the outside market for the sale of their cloth, as well as for the designs they use. All the independent weavers from this and the surrounding areas take their products for sale to the cloth *hāt* held in Howrah every Tuesday morning. (This is a famous weekly market in Bengal.) There they sell their cloth to retail agents, and casual buyers may also pick up attractive bargains at wholesale prices.

Weaving is not a profitable occupation today. Due to the high cost of cotton yarn as well as the high cost of living, few weavers are now independent producers. The majority take orders from *mahājans*, who supply the yarn and the designs to be woven. The weavers may work either for a daily wage or receive a part of the price of the cloth.

In this village almost all the Tanti homes have one or two looms, and the men work them. The women starch and wind the yarn, tasks requiring skill and involving hardship. The Tantis here own land, and grow as much of their own food as they can. In the adjoining village, however, little cultivation was noticed among the Tantis.

Another important village industry is that of the milkman or the Goalas. Cottage cheese or *chānā* is made from the milk and taken daily to Calcutta for sale. The price of *chānā* varies from day to day. Every man takes his produce to a particular trader who pays him weekly, according to current rates. On special occasions the Goalas may receive orders to prepare *dai* (curd) or *khir* (thickened milk), but the *chānā* is made daily. Cloth and cheese are the most important exports of the village besides its cash crops. There are, however, a few potters who make pots, and oilmen who make oil, which may be sold within the village or in the nearby weekly market.

## THE COMMUTERS

The influence of the city is further felt and transmitted by the literate members of the community who work at office jobs. Working in the offices of Calcutta by the Brahmans, Kāyasthas, and now by a few Tantis, has become a significant part of the village economic system. As the income from land is not sufficient, and as the size of the land owned decreases through continuous division, it is necessary to bring in money from other sources. Educated villagers aspire to be clerks. Almost all the office-goers are daily commuters and spend much of their time in travelling. Office-going has been in vogue for two generations, and has given a particular stamp to the community. House-wives must rise early enough to provide a complete meal to the office-goers by 6-30 a.m., and on week days, the upper caste homes are without men for twelve hours of the day. It is estimated that a monthly income of Rs. 150 or thereabouts, in addition to the food grown in the village, is sufficient to provide a comfortable living to an average family. Anyone with an income of Rs. 400 or more would be considered wealthy.

## POPULATION

According to the census of 1951, our village has a population of 1,603 persons with 752 females and 851 males. No great movement of population has taken place here, there being no influx of refugees from Eastern Pakistan. The population is divided into twenty caste groups, and five non-caste groups. The latter are either non-Hindu or non-Bengali. Non-Bengali people are referred to by their province of origin like Bihari or Oriya. That divisions exist among the provincial groups is a matter of indifference to the Bengali-speakers. Some labourers, originally brought in by the railroads, have formed a group of mixed castes and tribes, and are referred to as *coolies* by the general community, their origins being no longer of interest. Besides these, some migratory tribal people come to these parts occasionally. They are mainly Oraons from the Palamai district. The Santals are old settlers here, and still



retain some tribal characteristics, but seem to be treated by the others as a very low caste. The Oraons are also treated similarly.

There is, moreover, a small Muslim population in this village. The behaviour of Hindus towards Muslims is similar to their behaviour toward castes with which social intercourse is minimal. Muslims are ceremonially unclean to the Hindus, and, therefore, their touch is avoided. A general personal relationship is, however, maintained between members of the two religious groups. The menfolk are known to each other and they exchange friendly greetings on the street. Muslims who have gained social and political importance are treated with respect by the Hindus although they are still ceremonially unclean. For official purposes, such as the Union Board, Hindus and Muslims visit each other at home. No trouble arose in this village during the communal riots of 1946-47. The hereditary occupation of the majority of Muslims in this village is dyeing and spinning yarn, and weaving. They also cultivate land. A mosque and a burial-ground distinguish the Muslim area.

I give below a list of the various castes in the village. I have mentioned the number of households in each caste against its name.

#### CASTE HIERARCHY

As in other parts of India, castes in this village form a hierarchy with the Brahman at the top. The castes at the bottom have food habits and customs which are ceremonially unclean according to Hindu ritualistic notions. Persons who deviate most from the Hindu ideals are ranked the lowest, as is the case with the Santals and the Oraons who retain many tribal traits. Castes such as Harhi, Dom and Muchi are considered to be low castes all over Bengal and are associated with unclean habits and occupations.

Castes at the bottom make conscious efforts to move up, and their desire for a change of status is recognised by the rest of the community. The first step toward this change is the giving up of occupations thought to be unclean. For instance, the Muchis who used to work in leather and hides gave up

NUMERICAL STRENGTH OF CASTE AND  
NON-CASTE GROUPS

<i>Caste groups</i>	<i>Number of households</i>
Bagdi	61
Brahman	44
Mahishya	34
Tanti	33
Santal	25
Muchi	16
Kāyastha	14
Goala	9
Dom	8
Dule	8
Chunuri	5
Dhoba	4
Kamar	4
Jugee	3
Moyra	3
Gandhabanik	2
Kumor	1
Napit	1
Kolu	1
Harhi	1
<b>TOTAL CASTE</b>	<b>277</b>
<i>Non-caste groups</i>	
Muslims	36
Coolie	5
Bihari	2
Oriya	2
Oraon	2
<b>TOTAL NON-CASTE</b>	<b>47</b>
<b>TOTAL CASTE &amp; NON-CASTE</b>	<b>324</b>

that work two generations ago, and since then took exclusively to agriculture. They will not even touch a dead animal nowadays. Their change of occupation leaves a gap in the village division of labour, as when a cow or a bull dies some



people must carry the carcass to the place set apart for it, and, if possible, skin it. Nowadays Santals and Oraons remove and skin the carcass. They do not, however, make sandals and other things with leather.

The hierarchy formed by the castes in the village is given below. It is necessary, however, to stress that the hierarchy is vague especially in the middle regions.

- |                   |                          |
|-------------------|--------------------------|
| (1) Brahman       | (5) Gandhabanik, Jugee   |
| (2) Kāyastha      | (6) Mahishya             |
| (3) Tanti, Goala  | (7) Bagdi, Dhoba, Muchi, |
| (4) Kumor, Kamar, | Chunuri, Dom, Dule,      |
| Napit, Kolu,      | Harhi                    |
| Moyra             | (8) Santal               |

These positions are judged on the basis of the ceremonial and the secular values of this village only, and may vary from those in other villages. Moreover, within this village there may be disagreement over these positions, and any of the castes may claim to be a little higher in rank. This feeling prevails particularly among castes considered to be equal in status.

Although the Brahman caste enjoys supremacy in sacred contexts, its secular status is not necessarily the highest. The Kāyastha caste here, as elsewhere in Bengal, ranks high in secular context. The few Kāyastha families in the village have been wealthier than the others for generations, and well advanced in education. The Kāyastha caste has the tradition of having worked as literary men in the courts of the Muslim rulers of old, and over the centuries many members of this caste leased or bought land from those rulers and became powerful *zamindārs* themselves. The Kāyasthas also acquired wealth through trade and commerce. When English education began in Bengal, the Kāyasthas along with the Brahmans adjusted themselves quickly to the new system, and entered in large numbers the new professions and the ranks of Government service. The Kāyastha caste in this village produced a well-known literary man at the end of the last century, who was also a high-ranking Government official. His family is still

considered to be the wealthiest in the village, though it is doubtful whether it is really so.

It is not customary in this village to record geneologies. The elders know the names of their ancestors for three or four generations, but little else about them, unless they happened to be distinguished in some way or other. The ancestors of the Brahman families long resident in the village functioned as priests to the other Brahman families. The Brahmans are ranked among themselves on the basis of whether or not their ancestors served as priests to non-Brahmans, for the high-ranking Brahmans were expected not to minister to the former. Today, however, many of the Brahmans of the highest status serve as priests to the Kāyasthas, Tantis, and other non-Brahmans of the higher ranks. The Bagdis have Brahmans of their own, and so does every other low caste. Brahmans acting as priests to these low castes may not inter-marry or inter-dine with the higher Brahmans. No Bagdi Brahmans reside in our village, but come from other villages when required.

The ancestors of the higher class Brahman families, besides acting as priests, were noted for their learning and maintained *tols* (seminaries). Brahman boys came there from great distances to be trained in Sanskrit grammar, literature and philosophy. Knowledge of these subjects was essential to priesthood. Non-Brahmans were not admitted to *tols*, but they obtained education along with the Brahmans in the *pathasalas* (secular schools).

The Brahmans and Kāyasthas together (along with the Baidyas in other parts) form the upper class or *bhadralok* (gentlemen) throughout Bengal. Although the Brahmans observe and maintain their ritual purity in regard to the Kāyasthas, this does not prevent informal relations being maintained between them. Equality obtains in all secular matters. Close friendships occur and informal visiting of homes is common. On social occasions the Kayasthas invite Brahmans to meals in which they serve all dishes except cooked rice which would pollute the Brahman.

The Tanti (weavers) and Goala (milkmen) practise clean occupations, and many of them are moneyed men in this village. Literacy is spreading more among the Tantis than



among the Goalas. A few Tantis have even taken up office jobs. Brahmans take food, excluding cooked rice, in the homes of these two castes also.

The castes grouped in the fourth position fill many of the various needs of village life. The Kumor (potter), Kamar (ironsmith), Napit (barber), Kolu (oilpresser), Moyra (Confectioner), all practise their caste occupations, but they also own some land and grow as much of their own food as possible. They are clean castes, and may serve water to the Brahmans. However, their standard of living is low, and they have not yet taken to bettering themselves through the means of education. The upper castes do not associate with them closely. It should be noted that only on account of economic superiority are the Tantis and Goalas placed above this group of castes.

The Gandhabanik (dealer in spices) caste is not low in economic status, but in keeping with the position of Baniks (traders) elsewhere in Bengal, it is ritually low in rank. Brahmans will not take water from members of this caste. The Jugee caste forms a strong group in East Bengal, but in our village it is an inconspicuous caste, and its members weave and till land. Like the Gandhabaniks, the Jugees have a ritually low status.

The Mahishyas claim that originally they were the only farming population in Bengal. Cultivation is their caste occupation. In this village they are very few and they are not as rich or educated as the Mahishyas in the Twenty-Four Parganas. But all the Mahishya families here own land, and either cultivate it themselves, or lease it to shareholders, and have a secure income. The Mahishyas are not ritually impure, but they have no opportunity to come in close association with the upper castes, and, therefore, their relative position, as judged by the latter, is ambiguous.

The castes listed in group seven are impure, forming the so-called untouchable castes. The Bagdis are in numerical majority in these areas. The physical prowess of the men of this caste was proverbial, and many of them were hired as guardsmen in the old *zamindāris* of Bengal. Traditionally the Bagdis were also associated with robbery and dacoity. This is not to say that all the men of this caste were engaged in

criminal pursuits, but that some well-known dacoits came from them. Today all the Bagdis are engaged in cultivation, and claim that to be their caste occupation. However, a remnant of the dacoity tradition is seen today in the worship of the *dacate* Kali (the goddess worshipped by the dacoits). A Kali Puja is held on the night after Shiva Chaturdashi in the month of February. A high-ranking Brahman priest performs the Puja, and people from the entire village, as well as many from the surrounding villages, come to the worship. However, the puja is of special significance to the Bagdi caste. Its members frequent the place in a body, perform such duties during the ceremony as are usually allotted to them, and hold a fair nearby. A fast is observed by them on this occasion. There is a myth that in the old days the Bagdis used to perform the Kali Puja before setting out on their dacoity expeditions. In this village the Bagdis regard themselves as the highest among the impure castes. However, they may not enter the inner rooms of the houses of the high castes, and persons who are particular about ritual cleanliness will change their clothes if touched by Bagdis.

The Dhoba caste is also considered to be unclean. The touching of soiled clothes belonging to members of all castes is believed to convey impurity to the Dhobas. Although their service is necessary to all people, the clothes washed by them become ritually impure, and high caste women rinse out these clothes in water before they wear them.

The giving up of leather work by Muchis has not helped them to be considered ritually pure. The Chunuris make lime by burning snails and this is looked upon as a dirty occupation. The Doms are traditionally the watchers of the burning ghats. The making of baskets from bamboo splits and canes is another of their caste occupations. The Dules are fishermen. The Harhis are attendants of women at childbirth. The Harhi women act as midwives, and are especially required to cut the umbilical cord and to perform all the dirty tasks while taking care of the mother and the new-born child. All these castes, however, have some association with cultivation besides their caste occupations, and many have forsaken their caste occupations altogether. Most of these people work as share-croppers



or as field labourers for a daily wage. Their traditional occupations do not bring them enough money—they have to eke it out with agriculture.

The Santals are regarded as cultivators. As already mentioned, they still retain many of their tribal habits, and will perform many functions which are considered unclean by the other castes. Santal women work in the fields along with men. In times of heavy work an entire household may be engaged in the field. This doubles the sustenance of the Santal houses. Due to their cooperative habits within the tribe and also within the household, the Santals are more often able to buy land by working as share-croppers or as day labourers than any other group at the same economic level.

Widows from the higher castes sell parched rice in the form of *murhi* and this provides them with some money. Lower caste women take to husking rice in the homes of the wealthy people. Where the traditional occupation provides a suitable source of income, widows practise it. Thus, Tanti women starch and wind yarn, Goala women sell milk and milk products, Dhoba women wash clothes, Dule women catch fish, etc.

#### RITUAL, PURITY AND IMPURITY

Much has been written about pollution. It may be noted here that "untouchability" exists not in relation to low castes only, but that it prevails in regard to all men and objects in appropriate situations. Thus, while low caste people would defile cooked food in high caste homes if they touch it, the touching of such food, and especially cooked rice, requires an amount of ceremonial cleanliness from the householders themselves, such as bathing and putting on pure clothes or other objects, and these must be washed everytime they are worn. Here the matter is not of objective cleanliness only, for a clean object coming in touch with one in which food had been kept, also needs to be washed.<sup>1</sup> Similarly, the Brahman, who is the purest of men, may not perform sacerdotal duties, or enter the room of worship, until he has properly cleansed himself through

<sup>1</sup> It is difficult to ascertain any reason for the defilement that is thought to come from cooked rice.

fasting and bathing, and the wearing of pure clothes. In this manner, he is separated from his ordinary activities. Moreover, the act of excretion makes one ritually unclean, and not only washing but a change of clothing is imperative. Before changing his clothes, even a Brahman may not enter his own room or touch any household objects, and if he is touched by a low caste man at such a moment the latter may be expected to need a change of clothing. Failure to observe ritual concerning bathing and clothes is thought to enhance the impurity of the low caste people.

Ideas regarding impurity are different from objective uncleanliness in that the impurity is contagious. It is transmissible from person to person; it is contagious. Ideas of purity and impurity are applicable to all castes and, if anything, the higher castes are more particular about them than the lower castes.

Women observe ritual purity more than men, and they are expected to be more particular about it than the man. Thus while Brahman men are invited to dine in non-Brahman houses, Brahman women are not. Even Kāyasthas do not invite Brahman women.

Pollution does not result in the complete prevention of contact between members of the higher and the lower castes, but only prescribes the mode of contact. For example, the Harhi or Bagdi servants in a Brahman house may wash clothes and hang them out when wet, but may not touch dry clothing. They may wash the cooking utensils, but may not touch the water for either drinking or bathing. Women of higher castes have to be employed for other types of work. Thus, a Tanti or a Kamar woman may come only to grind the spices and to clean the kitchen, but she will not touch the cooked food or go near the lighted kitchen fire. People know which objects may be touched by which castes.

#### HOUSEHOLD

Caste rules are observed and maintained within the household. The joint household is usual among the upper castes. Among the lower castes, extended and complicated relationships within one house are rare. In a joint household, male descendents



of the builder of the house stay in the same premises over several generations. It is quite common to come across a house which is over two centuries old and with descendants of the same pair of ancestors still living in it. When relationships within a house become greatly extended, the house may be partitioned and separate kitchens set up for individual family units. Each of these units may itself contain members of three generations. Even when some members of a household reside outside the village, it is accepted that they have shares in the house.

Lower caste people, on the other hand, usually tend to separate from their brothers after the death of the father, or soon after they are married. This separation is due primarily to the smallness of the dwelling units, and the fact that every male member must earn his own income. Unless some income comes from a common source, a joint household has no particular advantage.

Although the house and property may be partitioned if members of a joint household are not on close terms, formal kinship behaviour is retained among them. On occasions when help is needed, as during marriage or death, it would be considered shameful if all the members of a house did not help each other. Within such a household a child grows up with children other than his brothers and sisters. Cousins are treated as siblings and the greater the amity between them, the more will be the harmony in the joint household in later years. Similarly, a child learns to behave toward those of his parents' generation, such as his father's brothers and their wives, his father's sisters, etc., with as much respect as he gives to his own parents, and with more of it if they are older than his father. Different kin terms are applied to uncles and aunts, according to whether they are older or younger than father, and they are further distinguished on the basis of seniority or juniority to father. A grandfather's brother is also called grandfather, and he is shown the same respect as is shown to the grandfather.

#### PERSONAL RELATIONS

In the village one may use kinship terms towards anyone with whom one has personal contact, regardless of caste or economic

status. Consideration is taken only of the person's age, and young children are especially taught this habit. Brahman or Kāyastha boys and girls will call the Muchi or Bagdi maid-servant "father's sister". The latter in turn may call the children in terms of *tui* (language used for junior members by elders of the house). Not only children but adults also may call old people of lower castes by kin terms.

Among people belonging to the same caste and economic group kinship terms are applied systematically to every member of the interacting households. Thus, if an old man is called grandfather, his son will be called "father's brother" and so forth. Friendship relations often take place between members of such closely interacting households. Friendships occur usually between persons of the same age. Boys who have grown up together or gone to school together consider each other friends. Various terms are in use which either mean friends or are symbolic of affection and loyalty. This is true also for girls. Friendship is recognised as a personal relation distinguished from an institutionalized relation, and may be maintained even while both the parties observe their caste prohibitions. It is usual, however, for friendship to develop among people of equal status. For instance, Brahmans are more apt to make friends with other Brahmans and Kāyasthas or Tantis than with members of other castes.

As the village is stable, boys' friendships last to mature years, and although with the growth of other interests the intensity of sentiments may diminish the mutual addressing of each other as friends is always continued. Girls are often married away from the community, and their movements are limited. So, the friendships they make in their childhood are often broken. Moreover, they are so completely absorbed in their households after marriage that they rarely take interest in forming new friendships in the community in which they are married.

#### VILLAGE GOVERNMENT

Formerly the assembly of the elderly men of each caste gathered to judge any irregularities among its members and in the community as a whole. Such associations called the *pañchāyat*



are completely lacking now. In each caste, the influential persons may be looked up to for providing leadership, but their decisions are not regarded as binding. In the community as a whole, literate persons from the upper castes are looked up to in critical situations. The formal administration of the village is now in the hands of the Union Board. Nine *mauzas* (villages) are conjoined in the Union Board, of which our village is a part. Nine persons are elected to the Union Board including the President. Each *mauza* village may not be represented at every election. The Union Board employs one secretary, and *chowkidars* (village watchmen) for each of the villages, the numbers varying from one to two according to the size of the villages. The office of the Union Board is in the President's house. The District Government authorities appoint four members of the Union Board to constitute a law court. It hears disputes among the residents of the nine villages. Conflicts over the debts of less than two hundred rupees are decided there. The court has the power to order imprisonment upto fifteen days or fine upto fifty rupees.

The Union Board collects taxes, makes and repairs roads, installs tube wells, and looks after the free primary schools maintained by the Government. Taxes are collected according to the income from land or other properties within the village. The Union Board has to obtain the sanction of the district authorities for spending money. Although no roads are wide enough for motor vehicles, the main roads are good enough for bullock carts and bicycles. There are five deep tube wells in the different parts of the village.

#### VILLAGE SCHOOLS

There is a free primary school in the village. It is attended by boys and girls of this and the neighbouring villages, as there are only three primary schools in the entire area of the Union Board. Although the schools are free and open to members of all castes, a look at the list of students shows that the students are drawn mainly from the upper castes.

Lower caste parents prefer to have their children working in field or home. The primary school ends at class four level.

There are only two high schools in the villages comprising the Union Board. The high school in our village ends at class nine and does not prepare students for the School Final Examination. The high school in the adjoining village does, however, go upto class ten, and of the four boys in our village preparing for the School Final Examination, two go to the latter school, and two go to the high school at the big town of Singur, ten miles away, commuting by train.

There is no girl's school other than the primary school. Girls desiring to go to school after the completion of class four will have to commute by train either to Singur or to Serampore which is fifteen miles away. As a result, to this day, only one girl from this village has passed the School Final Examination.

A few Brahman and Kāyastha young men from this village are attending colleges in Calcutta. Commercial colleges are especially liked. The purpose of college education is mainly to prepare one for an office job. Only one young man in the village is studying for a Master's degree. He is a Brahman from a literary family. He gave up a job in order to go to the University. The villagers thought him queer for this, although his interest in learning earned him their respect.

#### RECREATION

A library has been established in the village through the efforts of the young men, and villagers have donated thirteen hundred books to it. People do not read newspapers. The men commuting to Calcutta daily bring back news of any importance. Two of the Brahmans and two Kāyasthas have radio sets worked with a battery in their homes. Plays are enacted and songs are sung on festive occasions. But the cinema also attracts attention, and both men and women will sometimes go ten to fifteen miles to see a cinema show.

#### SCIENTIFIC ATTITUDES

There is little scientific thinking among the majority of the villages, especially in the matter of controlling mishaps or misfortunes. If, for instance, a person falls ill, or if his house



burns down accidentally, or if he does not get enough crops from his fields, it is ascribed to his bad luck, or to his having failed to perform some rituals. The lack of scientific thinking is greater among women than among men, and more among the lower castes than among the higher castes. Thus, for instance, if a child shows symptoms of certain types of illness, instead of calling a doctor, the housewives call an *ojha* belonging to the lower castes for driving away the evil spirits and, at the same time, offerings are made to Shasthi, the goddess who protects children. Some ailments are believed to be better cured by *ojhas* than by medical practitioners. Actually, there is no medical man in this village. Two physicians who live in the town two or three miles away are called in serious cases of illness by families who can afford to pay them. One quack practises in the village and is patronised mainly by the lower castes.

Belief in astrology is strong, not only in cases of misfortunes but in sacred ritual life in general. People consult the astrologer for important events such as the giving of first rice to babies, sacred thread, and marriage. Printed almanacs giving the days of festivals and much other information are used here as everywhere else in Bengal.

#### RELIGIOUS ACTIVITIES

Many of the high caste houses have a separate room for worship in which is kept an image of a deity, perhaps installed there by the founding ancestor of the family. This deity is a symbol of solidarity between the various branches of a household, even after the house is partitioned. The cost of worship is borne by all members of the house. A priest comes to worship the deity daily or periodically as is customary in the household. A Brahman householder is not expected to do his own worship if the image is that of Narayana, and on important occasions he must have a priest from another Brahman family. A priest inherits the right to serve a given number of families. If there is no separate room, a platform in a corner is used for keeping the images. Usually the goddess Lakshmi (the goddess of paddy and property) is worshipped in all homes, big and small, in the months of September, January and March.

There is a temple in the village, similar to most temples in Bengal, built by influential *zamindārs* several centuries ago. Some land is bequeathed to the temple, the income from which goes into a temple fund. The temple priest and his family also live on the income from this land. The deity symbolizes one manifestation of Durga, and is worshipped every day. The villagers, however, do not have much contact with the temple and visit it only in fulfilment of vows.

The more popular village-deities are the stone images lying under some big trees. They are placed on a high altar built under the trees, and the housewives worship them. Women from the lower castes visit these deities as well as deities of the higher castes. Images of Shiva predominate, but there are also representations of Shashti (protector of children), Shitala (healer of smallpox), and Manasa (controller of snakes).

#### VILLAGE FESTIVALS

The worship of permanent images calls forth individual acts of worshipping. Collective participation in religious ceremonies, however, takes place on festival days. These are many and a few will be mentioned here. The Durga Puja in autumn is a big festival. Formerly Durga Puja used to be celebrated in four houses of the Brahmans and Kāyasthas. In the last twenty-five years, however, only one Puja is held to which all the castes contribute. It is stated that none of the families is now wealthy enough to celebrate Durga Puja individually. While all castes join together to celebrate the festival, only the Brahmans, Kāyasthas and Tantis offer *pushpanjali* (flower offerings). Two years ago the Bagdis also wanted the right to offer *pushpanjali*. They were not permitted, however, because the Brahman priests would not officiate for the Bagdis. The latter were told by the higher castes to have a Durga Puja of their own with their own priests, and the entire village would contribute to it. The Bagdis did not consent to this suggestion, but stayed away in a body from the ceremony. The feeling was not against the Bagdis offering *pushpanjali* but against asking Brahman priests to officiate for them.



Historically the Durga Puja is an upper caste ceremony, being performed in the old days by the kings and zamindars. Although it is becoming more and more popular through the medium of the community fund collection, some other festivals have more appeal to the lower castes. Manasa Puja, for example, in the middle of September, although performed by all castes, is especially important to the Bagdis and others of their general status. The *dacaté* Kali Puja has already been cited.

Rathajatra or Doljatra (Holi) are among many of the festivals throughout India which are here also celebrated by persons of all castes together. But festivals which are particularly features of village communities are those of *Nabanna* and *Paush-parbana*. *Nabanna* is the harvest festival. An auspicious day is selected by the village elders in the month of December when the new rice is offered to the deities and then partaken by all the people. Preparations of the new rice take place in every home. Each village decides for itself when to celebrate the festival. The festival of *Paush-parbana* is also related to the harvest season. It is celebrated on the last day of the month of *Paush* (January 15th) in honour of the goddess Lakshmi. A particular type of sweet called *pitha*, made from ground rice with coconuts and dried milk, is prepared in every house on this day.

*Gajan* is another festival of rural Bengal held on the last day of the Bengali year (April 13th). This festival is related to Shiva who is conceived of as a mendicant not wanting any of the luxuries of life, and, therefore, not needing to be propitiated with pomp. The temples of Tarakeshwar near the village are important centres for this and other ceremonies relating to Shiva. For a month prior to *Gajan*, many men become temporary mendicants in fulfilment of vows they have previously undertaken. Many of the penances also involve the performance of popular acrobatic feats. Anybody from any caste may become a mendicant. For the time being, caste differences are ignored among them as all are holy men. Formerly many of the penances performed at *Gajan* involved the infliction of some pain on oneself. These have now stopped.

## CONCLUSION

The village community described here is not only typical of the Hooghly district, but of the whole of rural Bengal within a radius of forty miles from Calcutta. Beyond this the picture changes somewhat, in that the working men of the upper class are not able to commute to offices in Calcutta, but must stay away from the village altogether. Some differences may also be found in the subsidiary crops grown in the different areas. But the features marked here, such as the division of labour among castes and their interdependence, the joint household of the higher castes, friendship relations with all members of village regardless of caste, the formal administration of the Union Board, the difficulties in the attainment of adequate education, hygiene and medicine, the lack of scientific thinking, and the performance of religious rituals which integrate the household as well as the entire village, are common to village communities all over Bengal.



VILLAGE communities all over the Indian sub-continent have a number of common features. The village settlement, as a unit of social organization, represents a solidarity different from that of the kin, the caste, and the class, and plays a vital role as an agency of socialization and social control. Each village is a distinct entity, has some individual mores and usages, and possesses a corporate unity. Different castes and communities inhabiting the village are integrated in its economic, social, and ritual pattern by ties of mutual and reciprocal obligations sanctioned and sustained by generally accepted conventions. Inside the village, community life is characterised by economic, social, and ritual co-operation existing between different castes. Important administrative functions are performed by the village council composed generally of village elders and village officials. Notwithstanding the existence of groups and factions inside the settlement, people of the village can, and often do, face the outside world as an organized, compact whole. However, from these fundamental similarities we need not assume that Indian villages have a similar pattern all over the country. They vary greatly in their internal structure and organization, in their ethos and world-view, and in their life-ways and thought-ways, on account of a variety of factors. Among others, the factors of size, population, and land-area, of ethnic composition and caste constitution, of the pattern of land-ownership, of the structure of authority and power-hierarchy, of the degree of isolation from or contact with urban areas, and of local traditions, account for this diversity in their structures.

#### ON THE PRINCE OF DECCAN PLATEAU

In this paper, I shall outline the social structure of Dewara, a mixed village in the predominantly tribal district of Adilabād in Hyderabad State. The culture-areas of Telengana and

Marāthwāda meet in Adilabād district, and Dewara is situated on the northern fringe of the Deccan plateau. Professor Christoph von Furer-Haimendorf's general description of the Adilabād Gond-area admirably suits the setting of this village, whose surroundings comprise, "wide, cultivated plains with little tree-growth other than an occasional group of mango or tamarind trees that mark a village site; rolling upwards where broad valleys, chequered with fields, alternate with low, wooded ridges." As Indian villages go, Dewara can be classed as a fairly large village in respect of its size, land-area, and population. It has a population of 1,090. From the point of view of its ethnic composition and caste constitution, the population of Dewara can be divided into four distinct groups: the tribal group, the Telugu-speaking Hindus, the Marāthi-speaking Hindus, and the Muslims. In respect of numerical strength the first two groups are nearly equal; the last two are smaller, but each forms a close-knit and compact block. Most of the land in Dewara is owned by an absentee landlord (a Muslim woman) who lives in Hyderabad city. Her absence from the village has important consequences for the constitution of the village council, for she cannot directly influence its deliberations and decisions. The number of proprietary tenants in the village is very small at present (1950); but recent land reforms and tribal welfare measures are likely to add considerably to their number. As both the landlord of the village, and minor government officials of any consequence, do not live in the settlement, the community enjoys considerable autonomy in its internal affairs, and is relatively free from outside pressures and influences. Its location in a comparatively remote area, at a considerable distance from large urban and industrial centres, has kept the bulk of the residents of Dewara relatively untouched by city-ways. However, being only a mile and a half away from the road joining two subdivisional administrative headquarters having railway stations, and lying on a minor bus route the village cannot be said to be completely free from urban contacts and influences. Its part-Tribal, part-Telugu, and part-Marāthi character gives distinctiveness to the village. This has necessitated a special pattern of inter-group adjustment.



## SOCIAL STRUCTURE OF DEWARA

An analysis of the caste constitution of Dewara is necessary for the understanding of its social structure. It has already been pointed out that the population of the village has four distinct elements. Technically, the three tribes (Rāj Gond, Kolam, and Pardhān) and the Muslims are not castes, for the tribes do not fit anywhere in the broad five-fold division of Hindu society and the Muslims clearly are non-Hindus; but in intra-village life they function practically as independent castes, possess caste-like organizations of their own, and demonstrate the same kind of solidarity as the castes do. Although most people in the village are bi- or tri-lingual, the Hindu element of its population can be divided into two separate groups on the basis of their mother-tongue. The five broad divisions of the Hindu society into Brahmins (priests and men of learning), Kshatriyas (warriors and rulers), Vaishyas (traders), artisans, and untouchables, provide only an all-India framework for the classification and ranking of castes in the social hierarchy: the effective unit of "caste" or "sub-caste" has a limited, regional spread. Castes and sub-castes in different culture-areas, and sub-culture-areas (which are often linguistic areas) are generally endogamous, and have little effective social intercourse with the other comparable groups in other culture-areas. This divides the Telugu- and Marāthi-speaking Hindus in a mixed village like Dewara into two separate blocks. A Telugu-speaking carpenter (Wadla) has the same social status as a Marāthi-speaking carpenter (Sutār); but the two may not intermarry; language, dress, customs, and beliefs separate them still further. In considering the organization of the castes, therefore, we shall have to examine the two blocks separately.

## TRIBAL GROUP

The tribal group is composed of three tribes: the Rāj Gonds, the Kolams, and the Pardhāns. The following table shows the number of families and the number of people belonging to these tribes:

TABLE I  
THE TRIBAL GROUP

<i>Name of the tribe</i>	<i>Number of families</i>	<i>Number of people</i>
Rāj Gonds	58	330
Kolams	6	39
Pardhāns	7	36
TOTAL	71	405

In this group the rich, land-owning Rāj Gonds are at the apex of the tribal hierarchy. They are easily the most influential tribal group in this region. The Kolams are their "poor cousins". Although they have an important place in the magico-religious life of the village community, they are practically landless, live in tiny huts, and are regarded as "dirty, simple and primitive" by their more sophisticated tribal compatriots. The Pardhāns, the third tribal group, are in a very different position. Unlike the Kolams, they cannot claim a near equal status with the Rāj Gonds. They are minstrels and bards of the Rāj Gonds whom they regard as their masters. The tribal group as a whole has a strong tribal feeling, and a distinct and vigorous ritual life. They are separated from their Hindu neighbours by their practice of cow-sacrifice and beef-eating—both of which are strictly forbidden for caste Hindus.

#### CASTE-HIERARCHY

Table II on page 206 illustrates the caste-hierarchy among the Telugu-speaking Hindus.

In all, the Telugu-speaking castes number 80 families and 446 individuals. It is significant that they do not include a caste belonging to the first three *varnas*. With the exception of the Mādigas who are untouchables, and the Bitchepollu who are a mixed group, all the other castes are "clean castes". They



TABLE II  
TELUGU-SPEAKING HINDUS

<i>Mannewar</i>		<i>Padmashāli</i>			
17 families—83 people		10 families—59 people			
Panch- Bramha Group	{	<i>Wadla</i> (carpenter)			
		1 family—7 people			
		<i>Kammari</i> (blacksmith)			
		2 families—9 people			
		<i>Ausula</i> (goldsmith)			
		3 families—23 people			
<i>Mera</i> (tailor)		<i>Gaondla</i> (toddy-tapper)		<i>Golla</i> (shepherd)	
3 families—22 people		1 family—2 people		19 families—110 people	
<i>Mangali</i> (barber)		<i>Sakali</i> (washerman)			
2 families—14 people		2 families—8 people			
<i>Mādiga</i>					
(untouchable farm-labourers and leather workers)					
15 families—79 people					
<i>Bitchepollu</i> (beggars)					
5 families—20 people					

belong to the fourth level of artisan, agricultural, and occupational castes. The Mannewar (agriculturists) and the Padmashāli (weavers) occupy the highest position in this group. The Mera (tailor), the Gaondla (toddy-tapper), and the Golla (shepherd) may be placed next; and all three have nearly equal status. The Mangali (barber) and the Sakali (washerman) are still lower. The Mādiga (untouchables) are the lowest caste of this group. The position of the Wadla (carpenter), Kammari (blacksmith) and the Ausula (goldsmith) is somewhat anomalous. In this part of India they do not constitute separate, endogamous castes, but together with two more groups, form a composite caste having a monopoly of five crafts. The five sections may freely intermarry, and change of craft is possible between the sections. Their mythology separates them from the rest of the Hindus; they do not accept food at the hands of any Hindu caste, nor does any Hindu caste (except the barber, washerman and Mādiga who have started eating from them in

comparatively recent times) eat food touched by them. They do not invite the Brahmin to officiate at their rites and ceremonies but have priests of their own caste. Nevertheless, they are clean castes, and in the caste-hierarchy they should be placed lower than the Mannewar—Padmashāli but higher than the Mera—Gaondla—Golla.

The Marāthi-speaking Hindu castes may be graded as follows:

TABLE III  
MARĀTHI-SPEAKING HINDUS

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	<i>Brahmin</i>
	1 family—5 people
	<i>Marar</i> (gardeners and agriculturists)
	12 families—69 people
	<i>Sūtār</i> (carpenter)
	1 family—10 people
	<i>Teli</i> (dealers in oil)
	<i>Mahar</i> (untouchable caste of agriculturists and farm-labourers)
	1 family—14 people

---

This group has in all 22 families with a total population of 132. The head of the Brahmin family is a school-master, and an immigrant to the village. The other castes practice either agriculture or a traditional craft or trade, or both. The Mahars are regarded as superior to the Telugu Mādigas.

The Muslims number 107 in this village, and have 22 families. The *fakirs* or religious beggars have a somewhat lower position in this group. The Muslims follow a different faith from the Hindus, eat beef, and are a mixed group composed of converts from low Hindu castes. It is not surprising that the Hindus look down upon them. But the fact that the Muslims were the ruling group in Hyderabad State until recently, gave them some special influence in the life of the village communities.

## II

The basic unit of organization in the village is the family. In popular opinion the joint family is regarded as the ideal, but



in actual practice large joint families comprising all the members even of three generations are not commonly met with. Elementary families grow into joint families, and then break up again into elementary families. Polygamous compound families are also met with. Table IV gives the number of different types of family units.

#### LINKED FAMILIES

The next unit may be described as the "linked families". Members of an extended family living in the settlement, but not sharing a common homestead, together with close affines constitute these linked families. The linked families could be described as a cluster of agnatically-related families and joint families, and of families having affinal ties with them. An agnatic lineage core possesses a special sense of solidarity, but in many spheres of life its members have to move with the families linked with them by affinal ties. They are expected to have close social and ritual contacts, and to help each other in times of trouble.

The *guda* or ward, which is a distinctive living quarter of the village, and caste or tribe or other community unit, constitute progressively wide groups after the linked families.

Dewara is divided into five *gudas*. Of these, the *Persa guda* is the largest, and contains 133 houses with a population of 735 people. This population is a mixed one, consisting of tribes—269 Rāj Gonds; 11 Kolams, and 21 Pardhāns; Telugu-speaking Hindus—19 goldsmiths, 22 tailors, 20 Mannewar agriculturists, 59 Padmashālis, 79 Mādiga untouchables, and 20 beggars; Marāthi-speaking Hindus—7 Telis (dealers in oil), 5 Brahmins, 10 carpenters, 32 Marars (gardeners and agriculturists), and 14 Mahar untouchables, and 107 Muslims. The other four quarters are smaller in size and population. The *Mandali guda* has 20 families with a population of 106 people. Among these are 16 Mannewar—Telugu-speaking agriculturists and 15 Pardhāns and 28 Kolams. The Pardhāns and the Kolams belong to the tribal group. The *Teli guda* has only 12 families with 66 people. As its name suggests it is inhabited principally by the Telis who are Marāthi-speaking

Hindus. Others are: 34 Marāthi-speaking Marars (gardeners and agriculturists), and 5 Telugu-speaking Gollas (shepherds). The fourth residential quarter, *Chikkad guda*, has 68 people living in 12 families. These include 61 tribal Rāj Gonds, 4 Telugu-speaking goldsmiths, and 3 Marāthi-speaking Marars (gardeners and agriculturists). The fifth, *Golla guda*, is exclusively inhabited by 18 families of Telugu-speaking shepherds. Their total population is 115. From this analysis of the composition of the different residential quarters, it will be evident that with the exception of one *guda* (the *Golla guda*), which belongs exclusively to one caste all the others have mixed populations. Each *guda* has an identity, and also some bonds which give it a feeling of solidarity. As we shall see a little later each of these quarters has a council of elders who have some important control functions. Effort is made to preserve "the name" and reputation of the *guda*. In inter-*guda* quarrels people are expected to side with their neighbours living in the same *guda*.

But more effective and important than the *guda*, is the unit of caste. Members of the same caste living in the village have close interaction. Most of the castes can be further divided into endogamous sub-castes. These share a common caste-name and occupation with the other sub-groups, have a common mythology, and inter-dine with the other sections of their caste more or less on a basis of equality. Prohibition of intermarriage between the different sub-groups, however, forces each to seek a horizontal solidarity with its own sub-group living in neighbouring villages. Considerations of space do not permit a detailed examination of the complex network of inter-caste relationships. Its main features are, however, well-known. An intricate system built around the concept of ritual pollution determines largely the nature of contacts between different groups in regard to touch, smoking, eating, drinking, marriage, and general social intercourse.

Other structural units, of lesser significance to village-life, but of considerable importance in the socio-religious life of the individual, are the phratry and the clan of the tribal groups, and the clan (*gotra* or *gotram*) and the lineage (*vansh* or *vansham*) of the Hindus. Among the tribal groups these units have a special significance, for they have elaborate cults and rituals



built around clan gods. These ceremonies necessitate periodic meetings of clansmen and their participation in common worship and sacrifices. As exogamous units they regulate marital unions within the tribe. With the rest of the Hindu castes, these units only regulate marriages, there being a rule that one should marry outside one's clan, and in a lineage bearing a name other than one's own. They do not have any common ceremonial or ritual life restricted only to the members of the clan or the lineage.

The four culture-groups have each a separate identity, although they do not possess any separate formal organizations. However, they have separate ceremonies and rituals, and in these they function as compact blocks.

TABLE IV  
TYPES OF FAMILY

I—A. Elementary families	77	} 43.1%
B. Elementary families (with dependants)	7	
II—A. Polygynous compound families	18	} 11.8%
B. Polygynous compound families (with dependants)	5	
III—Joint families	80	} 41.0%
IV—Miscellaneous	529	

### III

We may now proceed to attempt a brief analysis of the structure of authority in the village. It has been pointed out earlier that no government official of any consequence is actually living in the village; nor does the village have a resident landlord. This leaves the village relatively free from outside pressure and interference. In other villages of this area the landlord and the minor government officials are some of the most powerful and influential figures in village affairs. Each family has a recognized head, who speaks for the whole family, and who is answerable to the village community for all acts of omission and commission by any member of his family. Each caste (and this includes the tribes as well as the Muslim community) in the village has a headman; and so has each

*guda*. These *Peddamanshi*, literally "big man", are recognized heads of their respective groups or residential quarters. Village customs define some of their obligations and rights; but their own personality determines the actual degree of their influence. Inter-caste disputes of a minor nature are referred to the headman of the caste in the village who decides them, in consultation with caste elders, according to the conventions of his caste. Inter-caste disputes of a simple nature are, similarly, decided by the head of the *guda* in consultation with the elders of his ward. The wards as well as the castes, both have their separate councils of elders known as the *pañchāyat*. The caste *pañchāyat* is presided over by the headman of the caste; and is composed of the elders of that particular caste. The ward council, on the other hand, consists of the elders from the ward and is presided over by the headman of the ward. The larger council for the whole village is composed of all the headmen of the different *gudas* as well as of the different castes in the village. Other persons of influence and substance also manage to find a place in its deliberations. Local matters, and inter-*guda* and inter-caste disputes of a slightly more serious type are heard and decided in this council. They may hear appeals from the decisions of the *guda* and caste councils. Mostly cases pertaining to the division of movable and immovable property, disputes regarding non-payment of borrowed money and grain, and household disputes, are brought to this council. In practice, however, the more vocal and assertive members of the village council become the *de facto* *pañchāyat* for the village. At the time of our investigations, the *de facto* village council consisted of four Rāj Gonds, one Golla, two weavers (one being the agent of the landlord) and one Muslim. It may be added that serious inter-caste disputes, and some of the more serious intra-caste disputes may be heard by the larger inter-village *pañchāyat* of the caste. Some cases may be heard both by the village *pañchāyat*, as well as by the caste *pañchāyat*. In Dewara the village *pañchāyat* is still vital and influential, and unlike its counterparts in some other parts of Hyderabad it has shown no signs of a gradual loss of hold over the people or of decline. No case of an open defiance of its judgments and decisions came to our notice. It is true that some land disputes from the village were



tried in the district courts, and that among the Rāj Gonds, in two cases at least notices for divorce proceedings were sent through pleaders, but these could hardly be regarded as indications of the weakening of the *pañchāyat*-organization. In no case has anyone refused to obey and carry out its decision, nor has anyone taken matters to the State law courts ignoring the verdicts given by the *pañchāyat*. Lack of aggressive factionalism in the village will perhaps explain this solidarity and strength of the village council. Public censure and ridicule, fines, and social boycott and excommunication are still very powerful weapons in the hands of the *pañchāyat* with the help of which it can enforce its will.

Mention may here be made of three petty government officials who have a position of some influence in the village community. These are the *Patel*, the *Kotwāl*, and the *Hawāldār*. The *Patel* assists in the collection of land revenue, arranges to send reports of breaches of law to the police, and generally looks after the arrangements for touring government officials. He maintains a record of significant events and developments in the village and also records births, marriages and sale of animals. Appointed by the State's Revenue Department, the *Patel* gets five per cent of the land revenue of the village for his work. The *Kotwāl*, belonging to the untouchable Mādiga caste, works as an assistant to the *Patel*. He carries weekly reports and information pertaining to serious crime to the police-station. He has to patrol the village in the night, to make government and village announcements by the beat of drum, and to look after the arrangements for touring government officials. The *Hawāldār* too is a sort of general assistant to the *Patel*. The *Kotwāl* and the *Hawāldār*, both get a salary of three rupees per month in addition to grants of bits of rent-free land. At harvest time, cultivators give them some grain also.<sup>1</sup>

There are no organized voluntary associations in the village. Informal groupings such as men's gossip groups and boys' play gangs occupy a place of importance in village affairs. Elderly

<sup>1</sup> For a detailed discussion of the web of inter-caste relations and of such traditional arrangements as well as for the analysis of a slightly different type of social structure, see the author's forthcoming *Indian Village* (London; Routledge and Kegan Paul).

women too have some fixed spots for their informal gatherings. It is in these men's and women's gossip groups that day-to-day developments in the village are reviewed, bits of news are exchanged and disseminated, ideas are mooted, and outlines for plans of action are formulated. It has been noted that these groups cut across the boundaries of caste and *guda*. They are built around one or more influential figures, and have a fixed core of permanent and loyal members. In addition to these, there are other "occasional" and some "doubtful" members too. At the time of our investigations there were eight more or less well-marked gossip groups of elderly men in Dewara. Three of these seemed to have had a definite say in the affairs of the village. Although each of these three groups often presses its own point of view in village affairs and functions in some ways as a faction, the leaders always try to remain behind the scenes and never allow their differences to become too public. So far, factionalism within the village community has not shown any tendency towards assuming aggressive proportions so as to put its central mechanism out of action.

#### IV

The kind of social symbiosis obtaining in the village has led to a distinct type of inter-group adjustment. The tribal group maintains its distinctive socio-ritual pattern; but has accepted traditional arrangements of co-operative labour in the economic and ritual fields. They do not give a place to the Brahmin in their socio-religious life, but the barber, the washerman, the carpenter, the blacksmith, the goldsmith, and the Mādiga feature prominently in their socio-religious rites and ceremonies. In their agricultural system, the occupational castes are integrated on the basis of established village conventions. The Muslims too share these arrangements. In the worship of village gods and in common village rituals and ceremonies, all the tribes, castes, and even the Muslims participate, follow a definite schedule of precedence, and have prescribed roles. The culture-groups or blocks participate in each other's distinctive ceremonies. The Hindus join some of the Rāj Gond and tribal ceremonials, as good social form, for



a while, but withdraw in good time before the cow-sacrifice. Token participation of the tribes and the Hindus in two important Muslim festivals is regarded as necessary. The Muslims join the Hindus, nominally, in some of their major festivals, but are active and enthusiastic in planning measures to ward off evil spirits, ghosts, and epidemics, in co-operation with their Hindu and tribal neighbours. In difficulty and distress tribal Kolam seers and magicians are summoned by the tribes, the Hindus and the Muslims alike. The identity and separateness of the four blocks are recognized, and in deciding disputes the village *pañchāyat* takes account of cultural differences and caste custom. As a concession to the needs of the local situation none of the Hindus regards the Rāj Gonds (or any other tribe) who sacrifice cows and eat beef, as depressed or untouchable. In fact, with the exception of the Brahmin, and some Padmashalis (weavers), men from the other castes do not hesitate in accepting water at their hands; and the lower castes even accept food from them. Leadership in village affairs is largely with the Rāj Gonds, and this fact is freely recognized.

This may be explained by historical and economic factors. Much of the territory in the district of Adilabad is recognized as "tribal territory" and is often described as "the land of the Gonds" who dominated the scene here in recent past not just by the strength of their numbers but by their political power and influence. Even when the Gond chieftains, who once ruled over this area, accepted the suzerainty of Muslim kings and were later divested of their estates, they maintained many of their feudal privileges. They jealously guarded the distinguishing features of their tribal culture, and resisted caste Hindu influences. In the State of Hyderabad the forces of Hinduization were weak because of its Muslim rule. In fact the caste-Hindus could never effectively protest and apply sanctions against the un-Hindu practices of the Rāj Gonds, for had they done so the rulers of the State would have sided with the tribes. Moreover, the numerical strength of the tribes in this region is such that they could easily defy the coercive sanctions of the Hindus. Notwithstanding the fact that in recent years tribal land has been passing into the hands of the cultivating castes of the Hindus (and some others as well), the Rāj Gonds

still retain a substantial part of the agricultural land in the district. Their partial economic independence has afforded them considerable cultural security. 'Consequent on the integration of Hyderabad into the Indian Union power equations in the State have also undergone significant changes. The Hindus know that the Muslims are no longer the rulers of the State; in fact they vaguely feel that now they (Hindus) are themselves the rulers. Some verbal protests have been made against the un-Hindu practices of the tribes, but so far they have not been supported by any sanctions nor could it be said that their sentiments have the backing of a substantial section of the Hindus. For example, in the course of our field-work one night Nāganna (a weaver by caste) who is a petty merchant, besides being the landlord's agent and who has been considerably influenced by city-ways, gave a long lecture on Hinduism and attempted by quoting scriptures to prove that the tribes were barbaric and unfit for social contacts with clean caste Hindus. He was particularly critical about the cow sacrifice and some of the marital practices of the Rāj Gonds. He did all this under the influence of drink and was shocked to find that no one came forward to support him. Some of the village elders tried to persuade him to go home and said, "May be, what you say is true. Religious books say many things, but do we practise all of them? We have lived with the Gonds as brothers so long and we must continue living in the same way. Our true scriptures in the village are our own traditions." Early next morning Nāganna was sober and voluntarily made amends for his insulting remarks. He went to Lachchhu Patel, the headman of the Rāj Gonds and the grand old man of the village, and offered his apologies to him for what he had said the previous night.

The village is a distinct structural entity like the kin-group, caste and tribe. All these entities control the conduct of the individual. Several villages come together both temporarily as well as permanently to form a wider structure. Dewara is the leader of a group consisting of sixteen villages.



## Glossary of Select Terms

- ADIBĀSI: A member of one of the tribes of India.
- AHMADIYA: A recent Sunni sect, Indian in origin.
- ĀRYA SAMĀJ: Reformist Hindu sect of north India founded by Swami Dayanand in 1875.
- BHAGAT: Priest-medium of a deity.
- BHĀT: Member of a caste of genealogists in Rajasthan and Gujarat.
- BIDI: Coarse Indian cigarette with a wrapping of dried leaf.
- BIGHA: Unit of land measurement in north India. About three *bighas* would amount to two acres.
- BIRTON: Ceremonial exchange of goods and services prevalent among the Gaddis of the Western Himalayas.
- CHĀRAN: Bards of Rajasthan and Gujarat.
- CHĀRPOI: A low stringed cot much in use in northern India.
- DARIKHANA: Drawing room.
- DARBAR: Court of an Indian prince.
- DĀRU: Distilled liquor.
- DASARA: Nine-day-festival celebrated in the lunar month of *Ashwini* (September-October).
- DEWASWOM: Property belonging to a temple.
- DHARMASHĀLA: Hospice for Hindu pilgrims.
- GHEE OR GHI: Clarified butter.
- GOTRA OR GOT: Vedic sage from whom descent is claimed by a member of a high caste. The term changes its meaning in certain areas of the country.
- GUR: Jaggery, crude brown sugar. In Malana, Gur means the medium of a deity. (Gor is a family priest in Gujarat).
- GURUDWĀRA: Sikh temple.
- HAWELI: A huge building, usually the residence of a very rich man, official or prince.
- INĀM: Land or other gift given to an individual by a ruler. The terms of the gift vary from place to place.
- JABAM (JAPA): Prayer in which Sanskrit verses are recited.
- JĀGARAN: Keeping awake at night as part of religious devotion.

JĀGIR: A grant of rent-free land by a ruler to an individual. *Jagirdār*, one to whom such land has been given.

JĀJMĀNI: Periodical payment in kind made to artisans and others by the peasants in U.P.

KALAM: Measure of grain in the Tamil country.

LAMBARDĀR: Person or chief in whose name the land of the lineage or joint family is held, and who also collects tax on behalf of the government.

LIKHNĀRA: Scribe—the man in charge of rural land records in north India. Called Shānbog, Karnam, Kulkarni, Talati, etc., in different parts of the country.

MANTAR (MANTRA): Sacred verse chanted on a ritual occasion.

MASĀLA: Spices used in cooking.

NĀDU (NĀD): Land or country or a territorial division of it. In rural Mysore the term is used to refer to agriculturist and shepherd castes as distinct from trading and artisan castes which use the suffix Shetti.

NAZARĀNA: Gift of money or object offered in homage to a ruler.

PATEL: Headman of a village.

PĀTTĀ: Document proving claim to ownership of land or other right.

PUJĀRI: Temple priest.

PUROHIT: Priest at wedding, funeral and other ritual occasions.

SAJ: A wedding rite among the Gaddis.

SIRPANCH: The head of a *pañchāyat* in northern India.

SURĀ: An alcoholic drink of the Gaddis.

TĀMBOL: A wedding rite of the Gaddis.

TAHSIL OR TEHSIL: A subdivision of a district.

TAHSILDĀR: Official in charge of a *tahsil*.

TARWĀD: A matrilineal residence group of the Nayars.

VAKIL: Lawyer.



## The Contributors

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